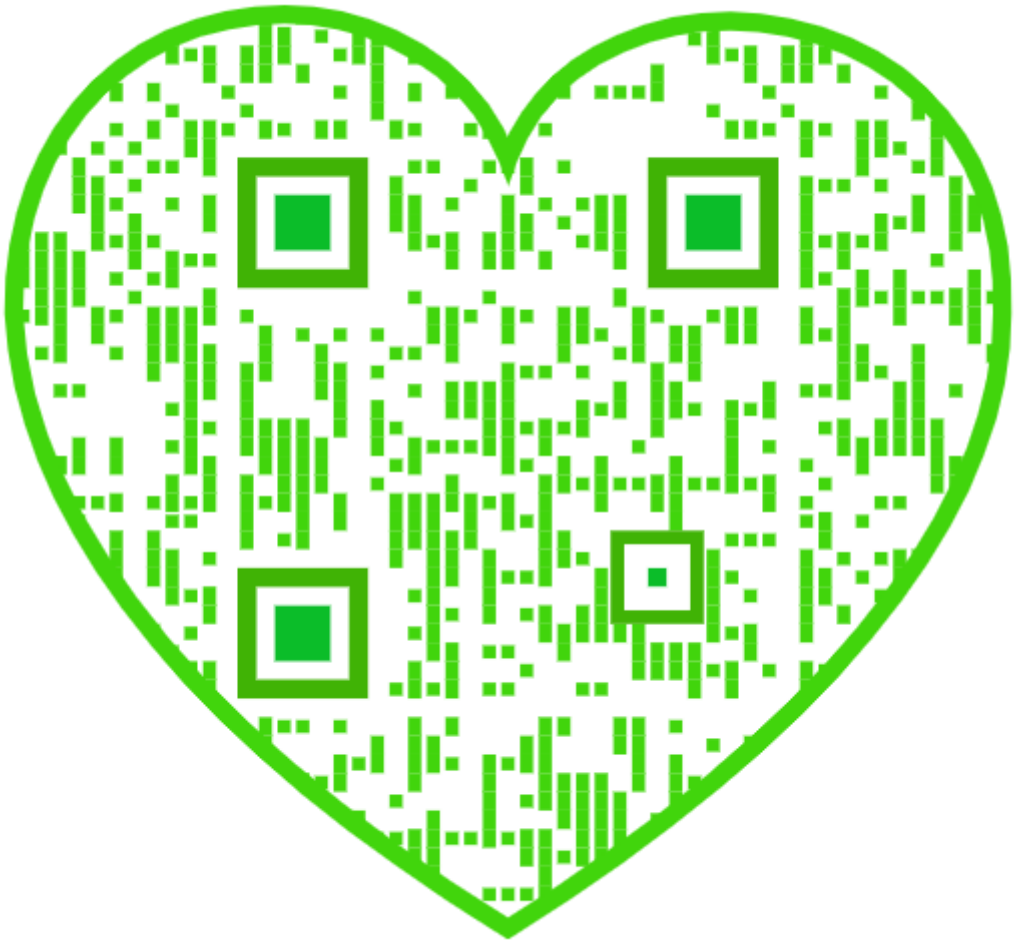

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LECTURES

TO

YOUNG PEOPLE:

BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

PASTOR OF THE SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN ALBANY.

WITH AN

INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS,

BY SAMUEL MILLER, D. D.

PROFESSOR IN THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY AT PRINCETON.

1873

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Southern District of New-York, ss.

L. S.

Be it remembered, That on the fourteenth day of July, A. D. 1830, in the fifty-fifth year of the independence of the United States of America, John P. Haven, of the said district, hath deposited in this office the title of a book, the right whereof he claims as proprietor, in the words following, to wit:

"Lectures to Young People: By William B. Sprague, D. D. Pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church in Albany. With an Introductory Address, by Samuel Miller, D. D. Professor in the Theological Seminary at Princeton."

In conformity to the act of congress of the United States, entitled "An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the time therein mentioned:" And also to an act entitled "An act supplementary to an act entitled 'An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of maps, charts and books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned,' and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving, and etching historical and other prints."

FREDERICK J. BETTS,
Clerk of the Southern District of New-York.

PREFACE.

The plan of the following course of Lectures was suggested to the author, by his having often felt the need of a book to put into the hands of the young, which would yield them counsel and instruction adapted to every variety of circumstances. Such a book he has here attempted to supply ;—a book designed to guard the moral principles and habits of youth, amidst the temptations of the world ; to impress them with the infinite obligations and advantages of religion ; to conduct them through that most interesting period of anxious inquiry concerning their salvation ; to bring them to a cordial acceptance of the gospel offer ; to assist them in ascertaining their claims to the christian character ; and to enable them to prosecute the various duties and conflicts of the christian life, in such a manner that they may finish their course with joy.

Several of these lectures were written during the author's connexion with his late charge at West-Springfield, and the whole course was originally intended especially for the benefit of the youth of that congregation. Since his connexion with his present charge, he has completed the course ; and the several lectures embraced in it have been delivered in the hearing of the youth to whom he now ministers : and it is in compliance with a respectful

and affectionate request from them, as well as in accordance with his original design, that the series is now given to the public.

To the youth of his *former* charge, whose friendly attentions he gratefully remembers, and in whose happiness he will ever cherish a lively interest, as well as to the youth of his *present* charge, whose many expressions of kindness he would gladly meet by his best efforts to do them good, these lectures are now

Affectionately inscribed,

With every sentiment of regard,

And with fervent prayers for their present and eternal well-being,

By their obliged friend,

W. B. SPRAGUE.

CONTENTS.

Page.

INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS, by the Rev. Dr. Miller, vii

LECTURE I.

IMPORTANCE OF THE PERIOD OF YOUTH.

PROVERBS IV 10.

Hear, O my son, and receive my sayings. 1

LECTURE II.

DANGER OF EVIL COMPANY.

I. CORINTHIANS XV. 33.

Evil communications corrupt good manners. 13

LECTURE III.

DANGER OF EVIL INSTRUCTION.

PROVERBS XIX. 27.

Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge. 31

LECTURE IV.

DANGER OF A LIFE OF PLEASURE.

ECCLESIASTES XI. 9.

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth; and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment. 57

LECTURE V.

REGARD TO THE FAVOR OF THE WORLD CONTRASTED WITH A REGARD TO THE FAVOR OF GOD.

I. THESSALONIANS II. 4.

Not as pleasing men, but God. 71

LECTURE VI.

RELIGION AN ALL PERVADING PRINCIPLE.

MATTHEW XIII. 8.

But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit. 89

LECTURE VII.

PERSUASIVE TO RELIGION.

LUKE XIV. 17.

Come, for all things are now ready..... 103

LECTURE VIII.

EXCUSES FOR THE NEGLECT OF RELIGION.

LUKE XIV. 18.

I pray thee, have me excused. 119

LECTURE IX.

AWAKING TO RELIGION.

ACTS XVI. 30.

What must I do to be saved?..... 137

LECTURE X.

EMBRACING RELIGION.

ACTS XVI. 31.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved..... 153

LECTURE XI.

EVIDENCE OF RELIGION.

MATTHEW VII. 21.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. 165

LECTURE XII.

PROFESSION OF RELIGION.

ISAIAH XLIV. 5.

One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel. 181

LECTURE XIII.

DEFENCE AGAINST TEMPTATION.

MATTHEW XXVI. 41.

Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation. 197

LECTURE XIV.

CHRISTIAN DECISION.

DANIEL III. 18.

Be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship thy golden image which thou hast set up. 215

LECTURE XV.

GROWTH IN GRACE.

II. PETER III. 18.

Grow in grace. 227

LECTURE XVI.

DOING GOOD.

GALATIANS VI. 10.

Let us do good unto all men. 251

LECTURE XVII.

THE YOUNG CHRISTIAN'S COURSE.

II. TIMOTHY IV. 7

I have finished my course. 275

INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS.

The man who becomes, by any means, instrumental in guiding a single youth to knowledge, virtue, piety, and true happiness, is a rich public benefactor: for the training of every such youth is a precious blessing conferred on his generation. But he who by sending forth a good Book; a book well adapted to serve as a guide to thousands beyond the reach of his personal address; and even to exert a benign influence on the temporal and eternal welfare of multitudes, in succession, long after he shall have ceased from his labors; is a benefactor to mankind to an extent which no human arithmetic can calculate. Not only are his contemporaries rendered much his debtors; but future generations also will have reason to rise up and call him blessed.

It gave me, therefore, unfeigned pleasure to learn that the Reverend Author of the ensuing Volume had been warmly solicited by a number of his friends, and had finally consented, to publish from the press a series of Lectures which had been, with much acceptance, addressed by him from the pulpit to the Youth of his pastoral charge. My long and intimate acquaintance with him, first as a beloved Pupil, and secondly as a highly esteemed Friend and Brother in the Gospel Ministry, con-

vinced me that he was well qualified to execute the task which he was prevailed upon to undertake, with honor to himself, and with benefit to his readers. Of course, when requested to introduce the work to the public, by a preliminary address, I could have no other objection than that which arose from a persuasion that such an introduction was altogether unnecessary. It struck me, too, that when a third person, at any time, interposes between an Author and his reader, and claims an audience first, he ought to have something weighty to offer; more weighty than I can hope to present in the pages assigned to this testimonial of respect and friendship. But whatever of reluctance may have arisen from these considerations, has been made to yield to the suggestion, that if the humblest individual should happen to be induced by this testimonial to procure and peruse the following lectures, I shall be richly rewarded for the offering. He who feels admonished by advancing age, that his period of active labor cannot be continued much longer, ought to be "ready to every good work;" and to be cautious of permitting false delicacy to deter him from the smallest effort to be useful.

Since the delivery of these Lectures, I have enjoyed the privilege of perusing a considerable portion of them in manuscript: and although it has not been in my power to extend this perusal to the whole work, yet I have examined so much of it as fully to confirm, and even to increase, all my previous expectations in its favor. So far as my opportunity of examination has extended, it is rich and judicious in matter; neat, perspicuous, and attractive in style; and peculiarly adapted to engage and reward the attention of enlightened, reflecting, and literary youth.

Indeed, if I were asked to point out a manual, better suited than any other within my knowledge, to be put into the hands of students in the higher literary institutions, I know not that it would be in my power to name one more likely to answer the purpose than this volume.

It is no objection to such a publication as the present, that a number of excellent works on the same general subject, are already in possession of the religious public; and that several of recent appearance, and much value are in very extensive and useful circulation. The truth is, works on practical religion, like works of devotion, provided they be well executed, can scarcely be too much multiplied. With respect to articles of secular trade, we know that an increase of demand must generally precede an increased supply. But this principle by no means applies to moral and spiritual provision. Here, indeed, the practical rule is rather the reverse. There is no natural demand in the human mind for religious instruction. The supply must precede and create the demand. We must abundantly replenish the market, nay, we must run the risk, as has been remarked, of "overstocking" it, if we would extend the taste for spiritual food. Besides, we know that personal and local considerations lead thousands, in every age, to patronize and read that which their own pastors or neighbors have published, when, perhaps, scarcely any thing else would bring them in contact with moral and religious works of the highest intrinsic excellence. Surely, in these circumstances, he who adds a new and excellent manual to those already in circulation, however numerous its predecessors, confers on the public a rich benefit.

The formation of the youthful mind to knowledge, virtue, and religion, is, in all countries, of incalculable moment. But in THIS FAVORED COUNTRY, it is manifestly a matter of most *peculiar* interest. In many other communities, the form of the government furnishes a substitute for popular purity. The strong and the prompt arm of power may be brought to bear continually, and may be applied with success to curb the excesses of unlawful indulgence, and to arrest the violence and the progress of crime. But the vital principle of *our* government is the intelligence and virtue of the people. *Here* public sentiment is every thing; and those whose character is now forming, are soon to govern that sentiment, and to hold in their hands the peace, the order, and the happiness, of the community. Now the hope of maintaining order and happiness in any social body without Religion, is a chimera. It never was, and never can be realized. It follows, of course, then, that the religious education of our Youth is, under God, our only hope. It ought to be the prime object of every lover of his country's welfare. The *Patriot* as well as the *Christian* ought to desire it, and pray for it without ceasing. Without it, the elective franchise, highly as we prize the privilege, will be a curse instead of a blessing. Without it, the liberty with which the great Governor of nations has been pleased to make us free, will only serve, in the end, to rivet upon us more ignoble and more wretched chains than any human despot ever forged. If I should see the formation of youthful character upon the principles of the gospel, becoming an object of earnest and general attention, I should consider it as an infinitely surer pledge of the stability of our national privileges, and the continued progress of our national greatness,

than all the human devices in the world could furnish; than all the secular improvements, which seem to be the idol of so many millions of our population. Thinking men ought to know, that these mere secular improvements, though multiplied and extended to any imaginable degree, can never make a people happy:—nay, that their extension without a corresponding moral and religious improvement, will infallibly serve to render any population more active in corruption, more fruitful in crime, and more opulently and splendidly miserable.

There is, perhaps, no class of the community more negligent of the department of Religion, in conducting the education of their youth, than the wealthy and the honorable. And to this fact, we are perhaps, to ascribe another, as melancholy as it is notorious; namely, that the children of what are commonly called the higher classes so frequently fall victims to dissipation and vice. The truth is, there is no portion of our youth who so imperiously need the restraining and purifying influence of Religion, in forming their character and habits as the children of opulent and distinguished families. Why is it that they are so frequently profligate; and so seldom either retain the wealth which has been bequeathed to them, or keep up the honors which their fathers acquired by knowledge, virtue, or public services? Obviously because they are commonly furnished with so many means of sensual gratification;—are placed in circumstances adapted so strongly to flatter and inflate;—and are surrounded with a thousand temptations, which are all so many bars to sobriety of mind. In short, feeling, at every step, as if they had something to sustain them besides their own exertions, and as if the advantages of

birth and fortune would more than supply the place of personal accomplishments, they too often fall into habits of gross self-indulgence, and soon forfeit all the advantages which they fondly imagined could never be lost. *Forfeit* them, did I say?—far worse than this;—they convert them into means of the most humiliating corruption and degradation; and thus often fall far lower than some of the most indigent and uneducated of their contemporaries. That this is the natural influence of wealth and station on the children of those who enjoy them, has been matter of universal experience: so that the instances of those who escape the baleful power of these circumstances, and in the midst of them, attain a character elevated, dignified, and pure, are proverbially rare. Now, can any thing more conclusively prove, that the children of the wealthy and the honorable, stand in more urgent need of the influence of Religion than any other class of the young; that there is the utmost danger of their being lost without it; and that nothing can more powerfully tend to guard them against their peculiar temptations, to inspire them with true elevation of sentiment and affection, and to render every temporal advantage at once an ornament and a blessing? We often tell the POOR, that VITAL RELIGION (the only kind of religion that deserves the name) is the richest treasure which *they* can seek for themselves and their children; that it is adapted to alleviate their sorrows, to sustain them under the heaviest trials of life, to lift them at once to usefulness and enjoyment, and to lead their offspring to the truest and best elevation. But quite as strongly, nay, by arguments of peculiar urgency, may we recommend this Treasure to the RICH, not only as the best hope of their *own* souls, but also as the only adequate hope of

their children; as the best of all security that those whom they love as themselves shall not prove fugitives and vagabonds on the earth; and convert all the advantages which they, with so much toil, have bequeathed to them, into mere incentives to crime and infamy.

With peculiar earnestness would I apply this train of remark to such youth as are enjoying the advantages of a refined literary education; and particularly to those young men who are ambitious of distinguishing themselves in the higher walks of literature and science. To such I would say—The object which you seek, is noble, is worthy of your pursuit. But, like every thing else, if it be not *sanctified*, you will have no ultimate reason to rejoice in it, even if attained. The Religion of Jesus Christ properly understood, and cordially embraced, gives to learning its highest finish; to genius its most exquisite power; to poetry its deepest feeling and tenderness; to eloquence its most resistless energy; to professional skill its most invaluable aids; and to political wisdom its happiest insight, and preparation for blessing mankind. The groves of *Academus* will assuredly prove more verdant, more fragrant and more fruitful, by having the "Tree of Life" planted and thriving in the midst of them. Nay, without the presence and power of the "Plant of Renown," their most luxuriant growth will be likely to be followed by morbid secretions, and pestilential influences, fitted to countervail, and more than countervail all their richest benefits. The beauties of *Homer* and *Virgil*, of *Horace*, *Demosthenes* and *Cicero*, will be more exquisitely relished, as well as more profitably improved, by those who have previously imbibed the true spirit of the Bible, than by any others. We may even go further,

and ask,—Can the refinements of classic literature, the ingenious dreams of Pagan mythology, and the recondite lore of mathematical and metaphysical science, fail of doing *harm*, if not consecrated by the faith and practice of true religion? Do not both scripture and experience inform us that they are adapted to puff up, and to corrupt, if not sanctified by an evangelical taste? In a word, we may say of every part of education,—If it have not a decisively CHRISTIAN CHARACTER conferred upon it,—it may boast and illude, it may dazzle and inflate; but can never be expected to promote the real purity or happiness of its most diligent votaries. To every aspirant after literary wealth and fame, then, the caution of the inspired Apostle is most appropriate and important—"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."

There is another thought of deep interest which occurs in this connexion. The highly favored, but most responsible population of this land, is now conducting an experiment of incalculable importance to ourselves and to mankind:—the experiment whether men are capable of self-government? In other words, whether they can live permanently and in peace under rulers of their own choice, and laws of their own formation; or whether they are destined, until the Millenium shall open on our world, continually to vibrate between anarchy and despotism;—between the manacles of privileged orders, and the exactions of an established Church—and the infuriated licentiousness of popular profligacy, which refuses to obey any law, either of God or man? This experiment, as I said, is now going on; and it will probably be de-

cided by the men of the next generation; by those whose principles and characters are now forming. Of course, every youth who is decisively won to the side of christian knowledge and practice, is so much gained to the cause of our national hopes. If, then, we wish to transmit all our privileges, civil and religious, unimpaired, to the latest posterity, let our young men be deeply imbued with the spirit of the BIBLE.—If we wish to avert from our country the curse of an ecclesiastical establishment, that bane of both church and state, let the BIBLE, and NOTHING BUT THE BIBLE, be impressed upon the minds of our youth, as the ONLY INFALLIBLE RULE OF FAITH AND PRACTICE. Here, and here only, do we find those principles which are equally opposed to slavery and licentiousness. Every young man who has been trained in the spirit of the Bible, will be, as far as his influence goes, an impregnable barrier against every species of oppression, civil or religious; and equally against every species of disorder. Only let the great mass of our population for the next forty years, drink deep into the spirit of the BIBLE, and we may probably consider our stability and happiness as a nation finally secured.

The peculiar character of the day in which we live presents a further incentive to the Young to seek after the best of all qualifications for being extensively useful. The lot of the present generation is cast in a period more strongly marked than any that ever preceded it, by a spirit of christian benevolence and enterprise. The friends of God and man are engaged more generally and zealously than ever before, in endeavoring to meliorate the intellectual and moral condition of mankind. That youth, then, who is not intelligently and decisively on

the side of Christ, is not fit to take his part in the great movements which now distinguish, and in some measure pervade the civilized world. He will either be a drone or a cypher in his day; or unite himself with that large mass who are the foes of all good, and who live for the miserable purpose of persuading men that their true glory will be promoted by trampling upon every divine institution, and dissolving every moral tie, however sacred. Can any youth of elevated sentiments be at a loss to decide which of these ranks he ought to join, and to the aid of which he ought to consecrate all the powers which God has given him?

I need not add, that genuine piety is the best pledge of personal and professional success in life. The youth who consents to embark on the ocean of life, in any profession, without unfeigned piety, is infatuated. He proceeds without compass or chart. He is without any sure "anchor of the soul." He is absolutely destitute of any thing suited either to hold, or to direct him securely on the troubled waters. On the other hand, all experience proves, that he who, in entering on his career, takes the Gospel of Christ as his guide in every pursuit—derives from it his standard of morals—appeals to it to learn his duty—to solve his doubts—to animate his hopes—and to form all his principles of action,—is in the fairest way to be happy in himself, beloved of all around him, prosperous in his affairs, and favored, in a word, with the best kind of success that true wisdom can desire or pray for here below. If man is to be prepared by education for the *duties* as well as the *business* of life, then surely that education which alone is likely to purify and quicken the conscience, to elevate the affections, to

soften the heart, to inspire with practical wisdom, and to bind the individual by the ties of supreme love to God, and by those of enlightened and impartial benevolence to men, is adapted to promote in the highest degree, personal and social happiness, in this life, as well as in that which is to come.

In forming the religious character here recommended, it is of the utmost importance that the foundation be laid in clear views of *divine truth*. Doctrinal knowledge is apt to be undervalued by private Christians, and especially by the young. They imagine, according to the popular prejudice, that if the heart be right, and the conduct correct, the doctrines embraced are of small moment. This supposes that the heart of any one may be right, while his principles are essentially wrong ; or that his practice may be pure, while his religious opinions are radically erroneous. But nothing can be more contrary both to Scripture and experience. The great Founder of our holy Religion declares that men are "sanctified by the truth." In fact, it is only so far as the truth is received, loved and obeyed that real religion has any place either in the heart or life. To suppose that any one can be sanctified, or in any respect benefited, by embracing error, is as repugnant to reason as it is to the word of God. He who "has a hope in him," ought ever to be ready to "give a reason for it with meekness and fear ;" and he *will* be ready to do so, if his hope be scriptural and intelligent. It is melancholy to think how frequently this matter is in a great measure disregarded by professing christians, otherwise well informed. Physicians, Lawyers, Merchants, and others, who confidently call themselves by the name of Christ, who have given many laborious days and nights

to the acquirement of other kinds of knowledge, and who would be ashamed of being found ignorant of those branches of literature or science to which they profess to have attended, manifest no shame whatever in acknowledging themselves ignorant of the plainest subjects in Theology. It is not intended here either to assign the reasons, or to show the sin and folly of this deplorable fact; but to remark that the foundation of this fact is commonly laid in *youth*. If the young, and even the thinking and serious portion of the young, were as careful to store their minds with elementary principles, and with clear, discriminating views of revealed truth, as they are with the best and most accredited elements of other sciences, we should not find so many hoary-headed christians unable to defend their own professed principles, and led astray by the artful votaries of error. That firm and accurate foundation of knowledge which is laid in youth, is most apt to remain unmoved, and to serve as a basis for the loftiest and most useful superstructure in after life.

But, above all, let the Young see to it, that they content not themselves with a mere doctrinal, or speculative religion. Listen, beloved youth, to the Servant of God, when he faithfully tells you in the following pages, that your nature is in a state of moral ruin; that you need pardoning mercy, and sanctifying grace; that you must be "transformed by the renewing of your minds," or be for ever shut out from the kingdom of God; and that that religion which will effectually serve you, either in life or death, must reign in the heart, and govern the conduct. The principles and the practice to which he invites you, are not those of a sect or party, but those of the Bible;

and without some experimental acquaintance with which no one is a Christian. And the more cordially and practically they are received, the more efficient will be their sustaining and sanctifying power, and the more benign the influence which they will diffuse over your whole character and destiny.

May the Divine blessing rest on this and every other attempt to conduct our precious Youth to knowledge, piety and salvation!

SAMUEL MILLER.

Princeton, July, 1830.

LECTURE I.

IMPORTANCE OF THE PERIOD OF YOUTH.

PROVERBS IV. 10.

HEAR, O MY SON, AND RECEIVE MY SAYINGS.

It can hardly have escaped the observation of any reader of the Bible, that a large part of the writings of Solomon, and especially of his proverbs, have a peculiar adaptation to the circumstances of the young. From this fact it is doubtless a legitimate inference, that he attached a peculiar importance to the period of youth; and as he was unrivalled for practical wisdom, and wrote under the inspiration of God, we may fairly conclude that his opinion on this subject is correct. It is, moreover, an opinion which has been held by the wise and good of every age; and it requires but a moment's reflection to perceive that it is built on a correct view of the principles of human nature, and of the connexion between man's character and destiny.

YOUTH IS A PERIOD OF GREAT IMPORTANCE. To illustrate this truth is the object of the present discourse.

I. The importance of the period of youth is manifest from the consideration that *it is the commencement of a rational and immortal existence, the condition of which is, in some important respects, concealed from us.*

Youth is the commencement of a *rational* existence. There are orders of being below us, which we contemplate with various degrees of interest, according to their different properties. We look, for instance, with higher emotions upon the operations of vegetable life in the flower unfolding its beauties, or the tree stretching forth its boughs towards heaven, than we do upon the clods of the valley. In the brute creation, we discover evidences of a still higher creating agency; for they are endued with animal life and instinct; with a capacity for enjoyment and suffering. But man, though only next above the brutes in the scale of being, leaves them, in respect to his capacities, at an immense distance. Superadded to his animal nature, is the gift of reason; a principle which is capable of an indefinite expansion; by which, standing on this earth, he can measure the heavens, and explore the distant parts of creation. Moreover, he has not only an intellectual, but a moral nature; he has a conscience, which recognizes God as a moral Governor, and his law as the rule of duty; and which more than intimates the fact of an approaching retribution. He is susceptible of enjoyment and suffering, not merely as an animal, but as an intellectual and moral being; and it is in these higher departments of his nature, that he is capable of enjoying the bliss of a seraph, or of being tortured with the agony of a fiend. However lightly man may think of himself as a creature of God, or however he may abuse his own powers, he is gifted in a manner which evidently points to some mighty result.

But it were a supposable case, that man might be endowed with the very powers which he now has, and yet, by an annihilating act of the Being who created him, his existence might, at some future period, be blotted out; and in this case, even the mighty capacities of the soul would, in a great measure, lose their importance.

But man is not only gifted with reason, but *is destined to immortality*. Time was, when he had no existence; but in all future time, he will be a living, intelligent, active being. When the foundations of the earth were laid, and the heavens spread out as a curtain, he did not exist to witness that exhibition of Almighty power; but when the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, he *will* exist, not only as a spectator, but a sharer in those amazing scenes. And farther and still farther onward in the progress of ages, even to an interminable duration, his existence will be protracted: it is not at his option whether it shall be continued or not; for immortality is entailed upon him; and though by his conduct he may affect the condition of his being, he can never accomplish the extinction of it.

But though it is certain that man is destined to an endless existence, *there is much in respect to the character of it, which, at its commencement, cannot be known, except by the Creator.* This is true even in respect to the *present* life. No one can predict with certainty what his condition will be, even during the brief period of his sojourning here: whether he is to be signally blessed by the smiles of Heaven, or to be unusually buffetted by the storms of adversity, is a problem which no present circumstances can enable him to solve. And so in regard to a *future* existence—we cannot decide in respect to any one, at his entrance into life, whether he is hereafter to be an heir of glory or an heir of woe;—a companion of fiends or a companion of angels. Such is the mutability of the world, the treachery of the heart, the sovereignty of God, that the condition of our being, both in the present and future life, must be, in a great measure, concealed from us, till we learn it by actual experience.

Collect now the several circumstances which have been mentioned under this article, and tell me whether they do not invest the morning of human life with pe-

culiar interest. It is the period in which a rational soul commences a career as unlimited as the existence of Jehovah, and attended by joy or woe which imagination in its boldest flights never conceived. And over the whole path of the soul's existence, there hangs, at present, a fearful uncertainty: no one can say, in what manner these unfolding faculties are hereafter to be employed; whether in serving God or in opposing him; whether in bringing upon the soul a perpetual shower of blessings, or an everlasting torrent of wrath. Is that an interesting moment, when the inexperienced adventurer steps from the shores of his native country, and trusts himself to the mighty deep, to be borne to some far distant region? How much more interesting the period, in which an immortal soul commences the voyage of life, not knowing how much he may be tempest-tossed during his passage, or whether he may not even be wrecked on the dark coast of eternity! If, in the former case, the eyes of anxious friends follow the mariner as he goes off into the deep, is it not reasonable to suppose, in the latter, that the watchful regards of angels are attracted by the condition of a young immortal, whose character is yet to be formed, and whose destiny is yet to be revealed?

II. The importance of the period of youth is farther evident from the consideration, that *probably, in most cases, it gives a complexion to the whole future existence.* Every moral action, no doubt, exerts an influence on the prevailing disposition of the person by whom it is performed; and if we could subject the character of an individual, at any given period, to a rigid analysis, we should find that it was precisely that which might be expected from the combined influence of all his previous moral actions. There are instances in which a *single* action, and that in itself apparently an unimportant one—has manifestly decided the character and the destiny for life. One wrong decision has not unfrequently been the

means of clothing the prospects of an individual with gloom and disgrace; while one good purpose, one victory gained over temptation, has often proved the seed which has yielded a rich harvest of reputation and virtue.

But if the influence of a single action, whether good or bad, has often such a decisive and visible bearing upon future character, what shall be said of the combined influence of all the actions which an individual performs, during *a considerable period of life*, and especially in *the season of youth*? It is at this period that the habits of thought, and feeling, and action, are formed; that the inclinations usually become fixed; and the whole character assumes a definite complexion. It would seem probable, therefore, antecedently to experience, that, in general, the first impulse given to the mind and heart would be the decisive one. But what reason teaches, experience abundantly confirms. If we look abroad into the world, some indeed we shall find who have disappointed the hopes which they early awakened in respect to usefulness and piety; and others, whose early life was a scene of profligacy, who have afterwards been plucked as brands from the burning; but in the great majority of instances, it will appear that the direction which the character received in youth, is retained in every succeeding period of life. In far the greater number of cases in which you see old age cheered by the hopes and comforts of religion, you will find that the foundation of this tranquillity was laid in the morning of life; and on the other hand, where you see hoary headed vice shuddering in despair on the borders of eternity, it will usually be safe to conclude that the agony which you witness is to be referred especially to the *early* neglect of religion.

Hitherto I have spoken only of the influence which the period of youth exerts upon the subsequent periods of the present life: but its influence is equally decisive upon *our whole future existence*. In many cases, indeed, the season of youth constitutes the whole period of

life, and of course, the whole period of probation: in all such instances, none can doubt that it must be decisive of the soul's everlasting destiny. Nor is the case materially different, where life is continued even to old age; for if our condition in a future world depends upon our character at death, and if our character in the later periods of the present life usually takes its complexion from the period of youth, then it follows that the influence of this period reaches onward to eternity;—that it is emphatically the seed-time for eternal life or eternal death.

III. Another consideration which still farther illustrates the importance of the period of youth is, that *it furnishes peculiar advantages for rendering the whole future existence happy; or for becoming practically religious.*

There is a *general susceptibility of character* attending this period, which is favorable to the cultivation of religion. I mean not to imply that the human heart is not originally the seat of corrupt inclinations; for that were to call in question not only the decision of the oracles of God, but the results of every day's experience. But this melancholy truth notwithstanding, it admits of no question that there is something in the very state of the soul during the period of youth, which may be said in a comparative sense, to favor the work of its own sanctification. The understanding, not having been brought under the dominion of prejudice, is open to the reception of truth. The conscience, not having had its dictates frequently opposed and trifled with, is ready faithfully to discharge its office. The various affections of the heart are easily excited; and more easily than at any subsequent period, may receive a right direction. Who will not say that there is in all this a most desirable preparation for becoming truly religious; especially when the state of the soul to which I have here referred, is contrasted with that almost invincible prejudice, that deep moral insensibility, which often results from long continued familiarity with the world.

Another advantage for embracing religion connected with this period, is, that *it is a season of comparative leisure*. True it is indeed that the want of time can never be reasonably urged by any human being, whatever may be his age or condition, as an apology for the neglect of religion; but there is no period in respect to which it has so little even of the semblance of reason, as that of youth. Then the cares of the world which cluster upon manhood, are comparatively unknown. The more active scenes of life—the strife of business, the din of worldly enterprise, are seen and heard only at a distance. Not as in subsequent life, is there a family to be provided for, and a thousand domestic cares pressing upon the heart, and putting in requisition the hands. There is much leisure for serious reading; especially for reading the volume of inspired truth, which is given to be a light to our feet, and a lamp to our paths. There is much leisure for serious reflection, and self-examination; for applying the truths of God's word to the regulation of the heart and life. There is much leisure for private communion with God; for christian intercourse; for attendance on the various means of religion; in short, for every thing which may be instrumental either of the renovation of the soul, or of its growth in grace. The season of youth, however it may be employed, is emphatically the leisure season of life; and he who does not find time to become religious then, has no reason to expect that he shall ever find it afterwards.

It is another favorable circumstance in respect to the period of which I am speaking, that *the efforts which are then made towards a life of religion, meet a peculiarly ready and cordial co-operation from christian friends*. When the christian looks upon the veteran in sin, who has reached an old age of carelessness, though his eye may affect his heart, as he reflects upon his character and his doom, yet the hopelessness of the case seems to damp resolution, and discourage effort; and even when he dis-

covers in him some relentings in view of the past, or some anxiety in respect to the future, it is difficult for him to regard even these as symptoms of thorough reformation. But in regard to the young it is far otherwise. So much is there in their circumstances to favor religious impressions, that christians are peculiarly encouraged to be faithful towards them. This is true especially of pious parents. They look upon their children, in the morning of life, with a mixture of concern and hope; and they are prompted not only by christian feeling, but by parental affection, to do every thing in their power to secure their salvation. Hence they often warn them of the danger of a life of sin, and urge them to enter immediately on a life of religion. Hence, every indication of serious feeling on the part of their children is regarded by them as a signal to double their diligence, in pressing upon them their obligations, and in endeavoring to bring them to repentance. Hence too, they make them the objects of daily prayer, and not only bring them around the domestic altar, but earnestly intercede for them in the closet. Nor are these efforts for the young confined to parents; but christians in general feel themselves especially called upon to labor and strive for their salvation; and whenever they show any symptoms of anxiety, there are many around them who stand ready to second every effort they make to escape from the wrath to come. And is it not a privilege, my young friends, thus to be wrestled for by christian parents;—thus to be borne on the hearts of God's people; —thus to be counselled, and exhorted, and aided by those who are walking in the path to heaven? Let repentance be delayed to old age, if indeed old age should ever arrive—and where then will be the pious mother to embalm her supplications with her tears; or where will be the companion in years to encourage and accompany you in the rugged path of self-denial; or where will the christians be found who will have hope enough in respect to you to come, while your last sands are running, and plead

you with the earnestness which they now manifest, to prepare for heaven?

As the last and perhaps the most important advantage for becoming religious, which belongs to the season of youth, I would say that *the Spirit of God then, more frequently than at any other period, exerts his gracious influences.* These influences he does indeed exert at every period; and sometimes even when the heart has become incrusted with the mildew of spiritual death: but experience proves that the young are far more likely to be the subjects of them than persons at a more advanced period of life. To them he speaks most frequently through the dispensations of Providence, the preaching of the word, the operations of conscience, and even the vanities of the world, and charges them to make religion the object of their immediate and supreme regard. And I may appeal to the fact that his *efficacious* influences actually are exerted during this period far more frequently than in any subsequent one; that much the larger part of all who embrace religion, do it in the morning of life. Let revivals of religion be brought to testify on this subject; and if I mistake not, you will find that, while a multitude of youth, during these scenes of divine mercy, are seen pressing into the kingdom, there are comparatively few who have reached the period of middle life, and only here and there an individual from the ranks of old age. What does this fact prove, my young friends, other than that the Holy Spirit is peculiarly ready to exert his influences in bringing *you* to repentance?

IV. My last general remark illustrative of the importance of the period of youth, is, that *it is fraught with peculiar dangers.*

In illustrating this article, I shall take for granted the fact that man is naturally inclined to evil;—a fact which, you will readily perceive, must invest with much additional importance the several sources of danger to which I shall refer.

There is danger resulting from that very *susceptibility of character*, which has already been mentioned as favorable to early piety. For if the mind is then peculiarly susceptible of truth, it is also proportionably susceptible of error. If the conscience possesses all its native sensibility, opposition to its dictates must exert a peculiarly hardening influence. If the feelings may be excited, with comparative ease, in favor of religion, they may even more readily be enlisted against it. And hence the melancholy fact is, that in a multitude of instances, the understanding, the conscience, the affections—the whole man, has become enslaved to a life of sin, at the very period when he was most susceptible of the influences of piety. Let no young person then repose in the conviction that his mountain stands strong, and that he is in no danger of becoming a hardened transgressor, merely because he is occasionally roused, or melted, or agitated, under the exhibition of divine truth: let him take heed lest the enemy come, and avail himself of that very susceptibility, to bind him hand and foot with the cords of depravity and error, and consign him over to a most fearful destruction.

Moreover, youth is a season of *inexperience;* and this constitutes another source of danger. Every one knows that our most valuable knowledge is derived from experience; that it is far more accurate, more deep, more practical than any other. But of this the young, from the nature of the case, cannot, in a great degree, avail themselves; as it is the exclusive prerogative of riper years. They have had but little experience of *their own hearts;* but little opportunity of tracing out the sources of human conduct, of becoming acquainted with the evil principles which lurk within them—the treachery, perverseness, rebellion, which constitute the elements of man's depraved nature. They have had but limited experience of *the world*, and are very inadequate judges of its true character. They have ordinarily seen only its bright side; have not often been pierced by its ingratitude, or betrayed by

its faithlessness, or stung by its neglect. Of its temptations too, of the stratagems of the wicked, of the serpentine influence of worldly pleasure, they know comparatively little. How manifestly does this want of experience give the world which they are entering, a powerful advantage over them. With but a slight knowledge of themselves, they are liable to misjudge in respect to the circumstances in which they shall be safe, and to put character and happiness in jeopardy, from a wrong estimate of their strength to resist temptation. With but a slight knowledge of the world, they are in danger of trusting it where it intends to betray; and of being carried headlong by its influence into the vortex of pleasure and vice, while yet they have scarcely suspected that they were beyond the limits of virtue and safety. Many a youth has gone into the haunts of sin, and finally into the world of wo, because at the commencement of his course, he did not suspect the danger.

Again: the world has its thousand *snares;* and here is another source of danger to the young. There are scenes of pleasure, which are misnamed innocent; which, while they avoid the grossness of dissipation, wear a bright and fascinating aspect to the young, and strongly tempt them to the neglect of religion. There are scenes of profane and intemperate riot, which, though enough to sicken the heart of piety, hold out a powerful temptation to many who have given a few of their first years to what is called innocent pleasure. There is the stage, with all its splendid apparatus for destroying immortal souls. The most burning strains of eloquence, and the most melting strains of music; the exquisite efforts of the pencil and of the chisel, are all prostituted to make an appeal to the youthful heart in favor of irreligion and licentiousness. There are evil books, written with a pen dipped in the poison of asps, for the very purpose of carrying to the youthful breast the elements of pollution and death. There are evil men, yes, and evil

women, too, who go about preaching the doctrine that religion is a dream, and death an eternal sleep; who encircle the unwary youth, in his down-sitting and his uprising, with the snares of death; and who are prepared to celebrate the wreck of his principles and of his hopes, with a shout of fiendlike exultation. In these circumstances, who will not say that the most appalling dangers hang around his path?

And now, in view of all that has been said, is it not manifest that youth is a period of great importance? I ask *you*, my young friends, whether, as the commencement of a rational and immortal existence, and as the period which is probably to give a complexion to that existence, it is not too important to be devoted to any other purposes than those for which it was designed? Is it not too important to be wasted in careless levity, in vain amusement; in any of the unfruitful works of darkness? Are not its advantages for becoming religious too important to be neglected; its dangers too serious to be regarded with unconcern? This critical and deeply interesting season will soon have passed away, and the period of manhood will succeed. The period of manhood, did I say? Ah, it may be the period of retribution; that in which the soul shall be mingling in the hosannas of the redeemed, or the wailing of the lost. But wherever, or in whatever circumstances, future years may find you, rely on it, the period of youth will have contributed much to make you what you will then be, both in respect to your character and condition. Regard each moment then as a price put into your hands to gain wisdom; and remember that now, now, emphatically in respect to you, is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation.

LECTURE II.

DANGER OF EVIL COMPANY.

1st CORINTHIANS XV. 33.

EVIL COMMUNICATIONS CORRUPT GOOD MANNERS.

Nothing is so valuable to man as his character. This is proverbial even in regard to the present life. Strip him of every thing else, and leave him with a good conscience, and what will probably attend it, a fair reputation, and all that you do will be comparatively harmless. You may have wounded his sensibility, or overcome his resolution, or clouded his worldly prospects; but he has that which, in the end, will be likely to place him above the power of malice. His character is a broad shield, which the arrows of adversity, and even the sting of detraction, can never effectually penetrate. Be his circumstances what they may, the fact that he has a good conscience and a good character, may justly render him contented and fearless.

But if the character which is formed here, be important in its relation to our present existence, it is infinitely more so, as it stands connected with eternity. This life is the only period of our probation. It is a school in which we are training for an immortal existence. Every moral action of our lives will exert an influence upon us either in heaven or hell; and the sum of these actions

will decide the complexion of our characters, and of course, our eternal destiny.

If these remarks be just, then it clearly follows that there is no part of our conduct which ought to be considered unimportant. The least departure from duty, the least violation of conscience, may be a seed which will produce a harvest of everlasting wo. It may be the germ of a sinful habit. It may be the first of a progressive series of wicked actions which will extend through eternity. It may prove the outer door to the temple of vice; and he who enters it, may reasonably expect to be led on, till he has explored all its scenes of pollution and darkness, and till he finally sacrifices his immortal soul on the altar of confirmed profligacy.

Perhaps there is no influence so uniform and so powerful in the formation of character, as that of example. This results from the fact that we are creatures of imitation: there is a principle in our nature which leads us instinctively, and from our earliest childhood, to copy the manners of those with whom we associate. This, to a great extent, is involuntary; insomuch that persons have often unconsciously contracted peculiarities of character, which, when they were reminded of them, they could instantly trace to the example of some friend. I do not here inquire whether we are more likely, from our constitution, to imitate good or bad examples; but only speak of the general influence of example, of whatever kind, founded on the fact that we are naturally imitative beings.

The considerations at which I have now just hinted, viz. that with the characters which we form here, must be connected not only our present but eternal condition, and that there is no influence more powerful in forming these characters than that of example;—these considerations, I think, must prepare you suitably to estimate the subject to which I am about to call your attention;—I mean the DANGER OF EVIL COMPANY. I wish each

one of you to hear for himself; and to let conscience make a faithful and honest application; and it is my earnest prayer to God, and I doubt not that it is the prayer of your parents who are here among you, that you may so listen, and so apply, that this discourse shall prove the means of making you better and happier through eternity.

That evil company has a corrupting and dangerous effect, is a fact so well understood, and so universally acknowledged, that it would be quite superfluous to enter into any direct proof of it. The wisest man in the world has long ago said that "a companion of fools shall be destroyed;" and who has not seen the assertion verified in instances almost innumerable? It will be more to our purpose, therefore, to show you the process by which evil example operates; or to notice the different principles which it brings into action, in corrupting the morals, degrading the character, and ruining the soul.

I. The danger of associating with wicked companions commences in the fact that *it renders vice familiar.*

I know it has been fashionable to say, in the language of a distinguished poet, that

> "Vice is a monster of so frightful mein,
> "That to be hated needs but to be seen;"

and on this principle some have gone so far as to justify the most profane and licentious exhibitions of the stage; and have gravely contended that those splendid scenes of impiety, decked out with all that is most attractive and provoking to the sensual appetites, are fitted indirectly to nourish good affections, and lead to a virtuous life. The fundamental error of this kind of philosophy is, that it overlooks the melancholy fact that man is a being of depraved inclinations; and the moment you bring him in contact with vice, you place by his side a companion to whom his arms and his heart involuntarily fly open. However you will account for the fact, all experience proves that there is a tendency in human nature to go

astray; and that while nothing more than the absence of restraint is necessary to the formation of evil habits, a habit of virtue and piety is always the result of fixed resolution and severe effort. If then the state of the heart naturally be such as to render it most sensible to the solicitations of vice, you will easily perceive how this consideration operates to invest all needless intercourse with evil company with great danger. You may apply fire to materials which are exposed to the frost and damps of winter, and you will find it difficult to produce a flame; but if you bring it in contact with some highly inflammable substance, you will see a blaze, or hear an explosion, in an instant. In like manner, if all our inclinations were originally on the side of virtue, the danger from being familiar with vice might be comparatively small; but the case becomes greatly changed, when it is recollected that we have within us evil propensities, which are ready to kindle as soon as the torch of temptation is applied to them.

I am aware that the circumstances of our present condition sometimes necessarily lead us to witness scenes of wickedness; but this, so far as it is unavoidable, is to be considered as constituting part of our trial, and as making a loud demand for our vigilant activity and resistance. But in a large part of the instances in which young persons are the witnesses of vice, it is not because Providence places them in the way of it in the course of their duty, but because they are prompted by inclination. Now let me say that those of you who have yielded so far to curiosity, or any other principle, as to place yourselves deliberately and unnecessarily in the way of vice, —I care not what kind it is—have unconsciously entered into a league with it. The fatal poison is already in your hand, and unless you cast it from you without delay, in all probability, you are ruined.

II. It is the tendency of mixing with bad associates, to *benumb and finally destroy the moral sense.*

By the moral sense, you will understand me to mean that faculty or principle of action, partly of an intellectual and partly of a moral character, by which we discern the difference between right and wrong, and approve the one and condemn the other. In some, I suppose, this faculty is originally more active and delicate than in others; but in all, it is an essential part of the human constitution, and is indispensable to moral agency. It is easy to see that in the formation of character, much will depend on cultivating or neglecting to cultivate it; and of course, whatever contributes to render our moral perception less accurate, or our moral sensibility less keen, must proportionably put in jeopardy our virtue. Now let me ask whether the voice of universal experience does not decide that mingling in evil company, and witnessing evil examples, has this unhappy tendency? Have not even persons of an established principle of piety, who have been called, in the course of providence, to mingle in scenes of wickedness, found it exceedingly difficult to maintain that high and awful sense of the evil of sin, which they wished to cultivate; and have they not been obliged to fortify themselves against this deadening influence, by a double degree of watchfulness and prayer? But perhaps there are some before me who can bear testimony on this subject from experience. Can you not remember the time when some particular vice, say that of profane swearing, or gaming, or drunkenness, excited in you emotions of disgust and even horror;—when you could hardly look upon its miserable victim without an aching heart? But it may be that you have since frequently been in vicious company; and the sounds of blasphemy and the riot and loathsomeness of intemperance have become familiar to you; and has not this familiarity rendered you insensible, in a great degree, to the odiousness of these vi-

ces? Nay, are there not some among you who can now commit, without much remorse, sins, the very thought of which would once have made you tremble? Look back, O young man, and see how far you have already fallen towards the gulf of profligacy and ruin; and then, in the light of your past experience, and over the ruins of a good conscience, look forward and prophecy concerning your future doom!

The extinction of the moral sense is usually very gradual, and the progress of its decline is often marked, with great accuracy, by the conduct. Every one knows that conscience is originally one of the most active and powerful of all the inhabitants of the human breast; and that she will never yield up her authority till she has sustained a severe struggle. There is nothing, perhaps, in which this conflict is more clearly marked, than in the progress of a young man, who has had a pious education, towards a habit of profaneness. Though he has been accustomed occasionally to hear the language of cursing from others, the impressions of his childhood are too strong, to allow him immediately to copy it. At length, in an evil hour, he summons resolution enough to make the awful experiment of uttering an oath; but his faltering tongue and blushing cheek proclaim, that there is a commotion and a remonstrance within. Conscience rouses up all her energies, and thunders out a rebuke, which almost puts him into the attitude of consternation. Perhaps his early resolutions to reverence the name and authority of God, come thronging upon his remembrance;—or perhaps the instructions of other days, enforced by parental affection, rise up before him;—or it may be, that the image of a departed parent, who had trained him up in the way that he should go, haunts his busy and agitated mind, and reproaches him with filial ingratitude. He resolves that the dreadful privilege of taking the name of God in vain, has been purchased at too great expense; and that he will not venture to re-

peat an experiment that has been so fruitful in remorse and agony. But presently he is heard to drop another oath, and another; and in each successive instance, the conflict with conscience becomes less severe, till, at length, this faithful reprover is silenced, and he blasphemes his Maker's name without remorse, and almost without his own observation. When I see an ingenuous youth taking the first steps in this path of death;—when I see his countenance change, and hear his voice falter, and the embarrassment and awkwardness of his manner tell me that conscience is uttering her remonstrance at the very moment when the language of profaneness is upon his lips, I say to myself, 'Poor young man, little do you know what disgrace and wretchedness you are treasuring up for yourself!' I regard him as having set his face like a flint towards perdition; and I read on his character, in dark and ominous letters, "*The glory is departed!*"

It is important here to be observed, that the effect of any particular vice in destroying the moral sense, is universal; that is, by being familiar with any one sin, the mind gradually contracts a degree of insensibility to all others. For instance, if you indulge in profaneness, the sin of licentiousness, or drunkenness, as an offence against God, will not appear to you in its native odiousness; for this plain reason, that, by indulging in sin of any kind, you lose your regard for God's authority. There is also such an intimate connexion between different vices, that it is exceedingly difficult to be devoted to one, without being, in a greater or less degree, the slave of more. Remember, therefore, that, in frequenting the company of the vicious, you expose yourselves not only to the particular vices which you may happen to witness in them, but to any others to which subsequent temptations may invite you; because, when you have once cast off the fear of God, your heart will be open to every bad impression, and will be a soil in which every kind of sin will flourish luxuriantly.

III. It is another effect of associating with evil company, that *it checks the operation of the principle of shame, or renders one regardless of the opinion of the world.* This too is part of our original constitution; and is so essential and active a principle, that the absence of it is always taken as a decisive indication of confirmed profligacy; insomuch that there is hardly a more striking epitome of a thoroughly depraved character, than that he is *without shame.* Though some higher principle than a regard to the opinion of the world is necessary to constitute an action good in the sight of God, or to be the foundation of a religious life; and though this principle, like every other, is liable to abuse, and needs to be properly restrained and regulated; still, no doubt it was intended by Providence to impose a check upon our vicious inclinations; and so essential is its operation to the welfare, and I may say, the existence of society, that if all those evil propensities which are now kept in check by a regard to the opinion of the world, were allowed to operate freely, it is probable that all the opposition which human laws could make to the vices of men, would be no more than the weakest mound of earth set to defy the angry torrent, as it comes rushing from the mountains. If, then, this principle be so important to the preservation of virtue in the community, and, of course, to the virtue of each individual, surely any thing which has a tendency to extinguish it is greatly to be deprecated; and that this is the direct tendency of evil company, must be obvious to every one. Here again, I appeal directly to the consciences of those, if there be any such before me, whose experience renders them the most competent judges. When you first associated with those who took the name of God in vain, would not the thought of *your* ever being heard to utter the same language have crimsoned your cheek with shame? But after a while, did not this peculiar sensibility to the opinion of the world so far wear off, that when

none but your sinful companions were present, you ventured a profane expression; and even after you could swear fearlessly in *their* presence, was it not a considerable time before you could feel willing to hazard an oath in the hearing of your serious friends? And when, after taking the name of God in vain, you have sometimes turned your face, and been unexpectedly met by the reproving countenance of some pious friend, have you not been awed into confusion by the majesty of virtue; and felt that you had done an act which, in the estimation of that good man, would cover you with disgrace? But you may, for ought I know, have long since bid adieu to all such scruples; and you may be congratulating yourselves upon the victory you have gained over a prejudice of education; and you may have become so shockingly familiar with the dialect of hell, that even the presence of the virtuous and good cannot restrain you from it: for all this may be calculated upon as a legitimate consequence of being often found in the way of sinners. Just so it is with the sin of intemperance. Probably the greatest drunkard in the community can remember the time when he would have shuddered at the thought of thus foolishly sacrificing his reputation; and perhaps there was hardly ever an instance in which a man yielded to this kind of temptation for the first time, that he was not thoroughly ashamed of it, and would turn his face from you when you met him in the street, lest your countenance should reveal to him your pity or contempt. But by frequently resorting to the company of drunkards, and by repeating a few times the brutish experiment, the flush of shame faded from his cheek, and made way for a still deeper hue of crimson, which proclaims that he is a shameless sot. And so it is with respect to every other bad habit. By frequenting the society of the vicious, a person soon comes practically to regard them as the most important part of the world; and consequently, his regard for the opinion of the good,

and his fear of losing it, are gradually diminished and destroyed.

IV. Another sentiment which is brought into operation in aid of a vicious habit, by associating with wicked companions, is *the dread of being singular.*

There is nothing that goes to the heart of a young man like "the world's dread laugh;" or the idea of standing alone; or of being charged with superstitious scruples of conscience: and this is a principle of which the abettors of vice are always sure to avail themselves, in regard to those who are inexperienced. When a young man, whose mind has been stored with good sentiments through the influence of education, falls into their company, it is wonderful to observe how their invention is quickened for devising means for his destruction. They take care not to display to him all the mysteries of iniquity at once, lest it should produce a shock which should drive him from their society. At first, perhaps, he discovers in them nothing more than an excessive cheerfulness; and so far, he thinks they may be imitated without much danger. But it is not long before he must take another step; and if he hesitates and falters now, he sees on one side, a reproachful frown, and on the other, a contemptuous smile: one, perhaps, charges him with unmanly superstition, and another with the want of independence; or it may be, the whole fraternity of them set up one general shout of ridicule. At such a moment, I look upon a young man as suspended between life and death; and as the experiment which is now going forward may result, I expect his eternal destiny will be decided. If I could look into his heart at this awful crisis, I should expect to find it in a state of fearful agitation; and if the power of reflection had not deserted him, to find him proposing to himself some such questions as these:—"What step is this which I am now tempted to take? Whither will it conduct me? May it not ruin my character, and ruin my

soul? What mean these counsels and warnings of my early youth, that now come knocking at the door of my heart? If I yield, will not the hearts of my pious friends bleed with tenfold deeper sorrow than if I were to die;—nay, will it not almost send a pang of agony down into the graves of my departed parents, who dedicated me to God, and with their dying breath charged me to beware of a life of sin? But how can I sustain the anguish of being singular? How can I bear to be thought mean and spiritless; to hear these shouts of ridicule, and witness these expressions of contempt? No, I will not submit to this intolerable burden: I will rush headlong into the haunts of sin, and endeavor to stifle conscience and drown reflection. Cease, then, to trouble me, ye recollections of my early days. Ye pious friends, who have followed me all my life with affectionate wishes and good offices, I can heed you no longer. I will sooner pierce all your hearts with anguish, than to stand alone and try to stem this torrent of ridicule. And you too, departed parents, even if I knew I should disturb the repose of your graves, and plant a thorn in that pillow which sustains your head in yonder lonely mansion,—I could not bear to be singular. Leave me therefore, friends; leave me, conscience; leave me, every tender and endearing recollection; leave me too, ye gloomy forebodings of future misery; and let me sacrifice myself as quietly as I can! I can hazard any thing else, even the eternal burnings of hell; but I cannot, I will not, hazard the odium of being singular!" I do believe, my hearers, that many a young man, who now sits in the seat of the scoffer, if he would honestly tell you his whole experience, would be obliged to relate the story of some such conflict as this which I have here supposed; and it may be that there are young persons before me, who can recollect something like it in their own experience. But if I *knew* there were such a case, I should hardly think it

premature to call upon you to begin even now to mourn for the death of an immortal soul.

V. I shall close the illustration of this subject with one more remark; and that is, that it is the tendency of evil company *to separate a person from the means of grace.*

What though he may live in the midst of christian privileges, and almost at the very threshold of the sanctuary;—will he, think you, enter those hallowed courts, where every thing betokens reverence and purity, when his heart loathes the service of his Maker? Will he deliberately place himself in the way of reproof for those very vices to which he has deliberately resolved to yield? Or will he be likely to read the word of God, when he meets his own sentence of condemnation on every page? I do not say indeed that the whole extent of this evil will ordinarily be realized in the early stages of vice: on the contrary, I well know that its progress, for the most part, is gradual: but I *do* say—and I appeal to the heart of every profligate for the truth of it—that the tendency of vicious company is, finally, to form a complete separation from all the means of religion. If he be entirely devoted to the service of sin, it were an absurdity to suppose that he should have either time or relish for the service of God; and even if he attend upon it with external formality for a while, it will soon become too irksome to be continued. And when the means of grace are once abandoned, I know not where we are to look for a more decisive symptom of a hard heart and a reprobate mind. We must not indeed venture to limit the power of the Most High; but if there ever be a case which, upon all the principles of human probability, we may pronounce hopeless, and in which our most awful apprehensions may reasonably cluster around the destiny of a fallen mortal, surely it is the case of him who has voluntarily cut himself off from the means of salvation.

On a review of this subject,

1. We may see *how insidious is vice*. From small and almost imperceptible beginnings, it gradually makes its way, till it reduces the whole man to its dominion, and brings into captivity every affection and faculty of the soul. It first throws out the bait of pleasure, and flatters its victim on to forbidden ground ; then it makes him the sport of temptation ; and does not give him over till he is fast bound in the chains of eternal death. In its very nature, it is deceitful ; it is a stranger to all open and honest dealing ; its very element is the region of false appearances, and lying promises, and fatal snares. When it addresses itself to the unwary youth, it puts on a smiling countenance, and makes fair pretensions, and takes care to conceal its hideous features, till, like a serpent, it has entwined him with its deadly folds, and rendered his escape impossible. For instance, how common is it for young men to yield to the solicitations of evil companions, from the notion that it discovers great independence of character ! But what sort of independence, I would ask, is that which cannot command resolution enough to resist a few worthless and wicked companions ? What sort of independence is that which had rather put at hazard the interests of eternity, than to brave the sneers of half a dozen vile associates ? The truth is that the person who acts this part, shows himself the greatest coward that walks the earth : he is afraid to encounter the reproaches of those whose censure is the highest praise ; and rather than do it, he deliberately consigns his character and his soul to destruction. Again, how often do young men become *profane*, from the idea that profaneness marks the gentleman ; and that to break out occasionally in the language of cursing, gives them a sort of dignity and importance. But let them go out into the street, and see in what kind of characters this vice is to be found in its most frightful perfection ; and then say

whether they wish to share the honor of profaneness with such companions. Let them listen to the poor drunkard who has fallen down in the highway, and is just waking from his beastly slumber, and they will find him muttering an oath ; cursing the God that made him, or it may be, the hand that is attempting to relieve him. Let them go into the most vulgar circles where not even decency is tolerated, and there they will find profaneness, vulgarity, and intemperance, mingling in the same scene of disgusting riot. And yet they are cheated into the delusion that, at least, an occasional indulgence in this vice makes them more respectable. They are beguiled, as were our first parents by the fatal apple ; and think not of the danger, till it is too late to avert it.

2. We learn from this subject, *how dreadful is the character of a corrupter of others*. Every wicked man is more or less chargeable with this, whether he particularly intends it or not ; because it is impossible for him to live in the world, without exerting an influence upon those with whom he associates ; and this influence will receive its complexion altogether from his character. But there *are* men with whom the business of corrupting others is a profession ; who deliberately lay their plans for ruining immortal souls ; who seize upon the unwary youth, like the animal upon his prey, and never leave him till they have accomplished his destruction. I know not that there are any such here : I am willing to believe there are none : but if such a man has been providentially sent to the sanctuary, I cannot feel willing that he should go away without a word of warning. And I am not going to expostulate with you in regard to the danger, or cruelty, or guilt of your conduct ; but only to direct your thoughts to one event, which will as certainly overtake you as that there is a God in Heaven. You are hastening to the judgment ; and at that awful bar, you will meet every soul that you have helped to destroy ; and

the blood of each of these souls will be upon your own head. Nay, more; your corrupting influence may be propagated from generation to generation; and thousands whom you may never see in the flesh, may recognize you at the judgment as their destroyer; and the united curses of all these miserable beings may be heaped upon you through the ages of a suffering eternity. If your heart has not absolutely received the dark seal of reprobation, or if all the fountains of feeling have not been congealed by the chilling atmosphere of vice, must not the prospect fill you with horror?

3. The subject *supplies an important argument to all in favor of a religious life.* It is but too common for persons of vicious character to take shelter under the plea that they injure none but themselves; and that, whatever the consequence of their conduct may be, they alone must bear it. Never was there a greater mistake. A corrupt example, even where it is not accompanied by a deliberate purpose of corruption, mingles contagion with the whole moral atmosphere in which it operates; and such must ever be its effect, until human nature is subject to a new set of laws. What a powerful motive is here for a life of virtue and piety! You are acting, not for yourselves alone, but for the world around you; and when we urge *you* to a life of religion, we are pleading in behalf of the immortal interests of your fellow men. What an argument also for the most exemplary circumspection on the part of the professed disciples of Christ! You may have even a living principle of religion, which will secure your own salvation; and yet for the want of proper vigilance, you may be betrayed into practices which will blast the rising germ of youthful promise, and even cause the darkest shades of vice to settle on some heart which had already begun to yield to the impressions of religion. How tremendous the thought that a friend, by a careless and unedifying example, should be instrumental in de-

stroying his friend for whom he would even have died! How delightful, on the other hand, is the reflection that, by yielding your hearts and lives to the purifying influence of the gospel, you may not only save yourselves, but may be preparing to meet some in heaven—it may be, the objects of your tenderest affection—who will have been conducted thither by the light of your example!

Finally: *Let every young person be deeply impressed with the danger of his situation, and avoid the beginning of evil.* I cannot suppose that there is a youth before me, who has deliberately formed the purpose to resign himself to a vicious habit, and to persevere in it till he shall enter eternity. But I have reason to fear that there are those here in whom this fearful result will actually be realized; those who are venturing into the path of vice with that most idle of all notions, that they shall retreat early enough to save their souls. Alas, with all your advantages, I fear you have not yet learned the slippery and insidious nature of vice. As well might you think to take the deadly viper into your bosom, and render him harmless by flattering words; or as well might you drink down the fatal poison, and expect to stop its progress in your system, when the blood had curdled at your heart, as to think of being the companion of fools, and yet not be destroyed. If you enter on a career of vice, and make the wicked your chosen companions, I acknowledge that Omnipotence may, in his adorable sovereignty, pluck you as a brand out of the burning; but without some special interposition which you have no right to expect, it is altogether probable that you will be lost forever. Your only safety lies in a cordial, practical, immediate reception of the gospel of Christ. Every other guide will mislead you:—this will conduct you safely and certainly to heaven.

And now, if such a conclusion would not do violence to all the principles of human calculation, I would fain

believe that all of you have resolved to enter immediately, and in earnest, on a religious life. But probably there are some here, who have not even thought of forming such a purpose; and perhaps others who have formed it, in whose remembrance it will hereafter exist, as a monument of the power of temptation, or the treachery of the heart. I confess that an ominous gloom settles upon my mind, as it ventures forward to explore the path of these persons through the darkness of futurity. I see them going away from this place, unaffected by all which they have heard, and returning to the haunts of sin with as keen a relish as ever. I see them becoming more and more hardened in vice, turning their backs upon religious instruction, and living as if eternity were a dream, and the word of God a fable. At no great distance onward in the path of life, I discover them struggling under the pressure of adversity. I hear them call to the world for assistance; but the world turns a deaf ear to their entreaties. I extend my views yet a little further, and see these same persons on the bed of death. I see by the sinking countenance, the fluttering pulse, the faltering accents, that their conflict with the destroyer has commenced. I cast an eye around me to see whether any of their former vicious companions are present, to try to sustain them in this awful exigency; but not one of them is to be seen: theirs was the work of destruction, not of consolation. I see them writhing in agonies unutterable; oppressed and appalled by the prospect of an opening retribution, without a hold in the universe on which to hang a single hope. I hear their lamentations over a mispent life; their cutting reflections upon their miserable associates; their agonizing supplications for a longer space for repentance: and while my eye rests with horror on the frightful impressions that Despair has made upon the countenance, I witness the ominous change, which tells me that the soul is in eternity. And then, amidst all the

wailings of parental tenderness which surround me ; and while my mind is busy in trying to recollect some word or look which might have been a symptom of repentance ; —even then, from that world where "hope never comes that comes to all," I seem to hear echoed in groans of unavailing anguish, "the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I am not saved!"

And is there a youth before me, of whose future lot all this may prove to have been a faithful prediction? Especially, is there one who has been dedicated to God, and had the benefit of a christian education and parental prayers, in whose experience this complicated wretchedness shall be realized? "O Lord God, thou knowest!"

LECTURE III.

DANGER OF EVIL INSTRUCTION.

PROVERBS XIX. 27.

CEASE, MY SON, TO HEAR THE INSTRUCTION THAT CAUSETH TO ERR FROM THE WORDS OF KNOWLEDGE.

The primary elements of a good character are good principles. Not that good principles necessarily imply a good character; for experience proves that passion often neutralizes their influence; but a truly good character does necessarily involve good principles. Let a system of false opinions in respect to religion once gain possession of any mind, and what can you expect but that from this bitter fountain will issue streams of corruption and death.

Hence it is that those evil men who corrupt and destroy the young, are exceedingly apt to assail, first, their religious principles; not doubting, if they can gain a victory here, that they shall be able, without difficulty, to storm the citadel of the heart. To this end, they often make the great truths of religion the subject of conversation; assailing them with sophistry on the one hand, and ridicule on the other. They thrust into their hands books and newspapers, to occupy their leisure, which are artfully designed to unhinge their moral and religious principles. And not unfrequently this malignant agency is exerted in a covert manner; and the youth is brought in contact with these vehicles of death, and has actually

begun to extract the poison, before he is aware of it. In short, every means of corrupting the principles of the young which the ingenuity of man can devise, has been, and still is, employed; and that too by persons of every rank, from the highest to the lowest in the community.

It is in reference to efforts like these that the wise man gives the advice contained in our text: "Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge." In the spirit of this direction, I shall endeavor, in the present discourse, first, to EXPOSE SOME OF THE ERRORS OF WHICH YOUTH AT THE PRESENT DAY ARE IN DANGER; and, secondly, URGE SOME CONSIDERATIONS TO DISSUADE THEM FROM BEING FOUND IN THE WAY OF EVIL INSTRUCTION.

I. I am, first, to EXPOSE SOME OF THE ERRORS OF WHICH YOUTH, AT THE PRESENT DAY, ARE IN DANGER.

1. The first which I shall notice, is, that *the Bible is not a divine revelation.*

I am aware that this is, by no means, a day of triumph for infidelity; and that the man who now openly casts off the authority of revelation, does it at the expense of being branded with at least some degree of public disgrace. Still there are to be found those, even at this day—and I fear not a few—who have hardihood enough to pronounce the Bible a forgery; who deliberately set themselves to seal this fountain of consolation against the wretched—this fountain of salvation against the sinner. Unhappily, we live so near the period in which the world was convulsed by what seemed the momentary triumph of infidelity, that infidels of our day find weapons enough for prosecuting their malignant warfare, forged at their hands; and yet, as it would seem, for no other purpose than to keep a malignant invention busy, they are, from time to time, replenishing their armory with other weapons of their own devising. Those to whom I now refer, are

open in their hostility to the Bible : they breathe out the venom of infidelity wherever they go ; and put their books in circulation whenever they have opportunity ; and glory in their shame. But there are others who lend their aid to the same cause by means a little less direct, but not less effectual. Perhaps they will not tell you that they believe the Bible to be a forgery ; perhaps they will even give a vague assent to its being a divine revelation ;—but they will tell you with nearly the same breath, of different passages which have a contradictory meaning ; of stories too trifling, and of doctrines too absurd, to have had such a Being as God for their author : and thus, by endeavoring to bring into contempt a part of the Bible, they aim to destroy the authority of the whole. So long as men of this character are scattered through society, who can doubt that young people are in danger of being corrupted by infidelity ?

Now, my young friends, I will tell you, if you are ever tempted, for a moment, to give heed to those who would persuade you to renounce your belief in the Bible as a divine revelation, what you must be able to prove, before you can consistently venture on infidel ground.

You must be able to show that the *miracles* of which the Bible contains a record, either were never performed, or if they were, that they do not prove its divine authority. If you take the former side of the alternative, and say that these miracles were never performed, you must still admit either that they were pretended to be performed, or they were not. If they were pretended to be performed, as recorded in scripture, it behooves you to show how it was that so many competent witnesses, and among them the most malignant enemies, in circumstances the most favorable for detecting imposture, and for several years in succession, should actually have been deceived. If you say that they were not pretended to be performed, then you have to account for the fact that such a record of them as that which the Bible contains, should have been made, at

the very time when the imposture—if it were one—was most open to detection ; and that it should have been circulated first among the very persons who would have been most interested and most able to detect it ; who yet never even pretended to call the facts in question. If you say that the record of these miracles was not made during the age in which they were professedly performed, but that it was palmed upon some succeeding age, then you have to account for the fact that the whole mass of historical testimony fixes the date of this record to nearly the period in which they are alleged to have been performed ; and you have this additional difficulty to solve, —how a record of facts, purporting to have occurred under the observation of the very people to whom the record was first given, could have been received by them as a true record, when, at the same time, no such facts had ever fallen within their knowledge.

But if you choose the latter side of the alternative, and say that these miracles were actually wrought, but still do not prove the Bible to be a divine revelation ;—you have then to show either that the God of truth would give the stamp of his authority to falsehood, or else that these mighty works were performed by the aid of evil spirits ; for that they transcended the limits of human power, admits of no question. The former of these suppositions—that Jehovah has lent his sanction to falsehood—you will not dare to admit, even in thought. If you admit the latter, and refer the miracles of the Bible to diabolical agency, then you have this great moral phenomenon to explain—how the enemy of all good came to be so heartily and earnestly engaged in the destruction of his own kingdom ; for the manifest tendency of all the miracles of the Bible was to promote the cause of righteousness.

Here then you perceive, at the threshold of infidelity, you have most serious difficulties to encounter ; but the half has not been told you. You have, farther, to ac-

count for the fact that this book contains a long chain of *prophecies*, extending almost from the beginning of the world to the present time, and to all future ages ;—that, as the plan of Providence has been developed, these prophecies have regularly had their fulfilment in the history of the church and the world ;—that the most minute and improbable events have occurred in exact correspondence with predictions which were written ages before their occurrence. If there were no divine wisdom here, whence this marvellous power of lifting the veil that hides futurity ? How is it that a worm can tell of things that are to be, unless it has been mounting up above the dust, and holding communion with Omniscience ? Who dares be so impious as to say that Jehovah would arrange the system of his Providence, to meet the conjectures of weak fanaticism or wicked imposture ?

You have, moreover, before you can consistently reject the divine authority of the Bible, to account for the fact that so many different persons as were concerned in writing it, living in different ages, in various states of society, and in circumstances to preclude the possibility of collusion, could have produced a book between whose various parts there is the most perfect, though evidently, on their part, the most undesigned, *harmony*. If all the letters of which the Bible is composed, were to be separated from each other, and thrown promiscuously into the air, and should fall to the earth in precisely the order which they originally held, making a regular and complete book, it would not be a greater anomaly in human experience, than would be found in the fact that such a book as the Bible is, in respect to the harmony of its parts, should have been made in the circumstances in which it *was* made, independently of divine inspiration.

You have still further to account for the fact, that men living in a rude state of society, and many of them with the most limited advantages for intellectual cultivation, should have produced compositions, which, in *sublimity*

both of thought and language, leave far behind the finest models whether of ancient or modern times. The most perfect specimens of narrative which the world has seen, are found in the gospels ; but what was there in the laborious occupation of fishermen, that gave promise of these matchless performances ? If you deny that these persons wrote under divine inspiration, whence the mighty difference between their productions, and what you could reasonably expect from persons in the same sphere of life, and with much better advantages of education, among ourselves ?

You have also to account for the fact, that the Bible presents a higher standard of *moral purity* than is any where else to be found ; that all its doctrines and precepts, all its promises and threatenings, are worthy of an infinitely holy God. Tell us, if this be imposture, how it has come to pass that wicked men—the enemies of holiness, have produced the holiest book that the world has ever seen. If they *could* have done this, where was the motive to influence them to it, so long as it was directly opposed to their corrupt views and purposes ? If they had *desired* to do it, would it not still, being conceived in sin, necessarily have borne, in a greater or less degree, the moral likeness of its authors ?

And, finally, you have to account for the wonderful *efficacy* with which the Bible has been attended. Compare the combined moral effects which have been produced by all the other books in the world, with those which have been produced by the Bible, and the former dwindle to nothing in the comparison. It is the Bible which is the means of accomplishing such wonderful transformations, as we sometimes see, of human character ;—making the proud, humble ; the vindictive, forgiving ; the cruel, tender-hearted ; causing the swearer to reverence the name of God ; the drunkard to lay aside his cups ; the dishonest man to give back his ill-gotten gains ; and the miser to open his coffers at the call of charity.

It is the Bible which has shed the light of peace and hope around the path of adversity; which has been a pillow for sickness, and a staff for old age; which has caused the voice of rejoicing to rise even from the valley of death. It is the Bible which has demolished altars of cruelty and temples of idolatry; which has illumined the wilderness with the light of civilization, and for savage customs has substituted the soft charities of life; which, as it travels round the globe, sends abroad a healing influence, and leaves a bright track of glory behind it. Whence is it, I ask, that the Bible produces these wonderful effects, if it has not God for its author? How is it, if it be the work of man, that it has survived all the efforts which have been made for its destruction; that, like the burning bush, it has been always on fire, and yet has never been consumed?

Such, my young friends, are some of the difficulties to be encountered, before you can, with any show of reason, reject the divine authority of the scriptures. You must be able to show that the miracles which the Bible records, either were never performed, or if they were, that they do not prove it to be a divine revelation; that the prophecies which it contains, notwithstanding their literal and exact accomplishment, were only fortunate conjectures. You must be able to account for the fact that so many writers, on such a subject, and in such circumstances, have written with perfect harmony; that men comparatively destitute of intellectual culture, have written with such unparalleled sublimity; that men of most corrupt minds, (for the idea of imposture necessarily supposes this,) have made a book which breathes the most elevated moral purity; and finally that this Book, bearing the signature of Heaven upon its title-page, and thus affronting Jehovah by a lie, has gone abroad, changing the moral wilderness into a garden, and pouring light and joy into every bosom by which it has been welcomed. Until you are able to account for these and many similar facts,

you cannot, for a moment, consistently place your foot on infidel ground. How then ought you to estimate the cavils of infidelity? As lighter than nothing, till you have deliberately and satisfactorily met all the difficulties which have now been suggested.

2. Another error of which young people, at the present day, are in danger, is, that *no atonement was necessary that God might pardon sin; and that it was no part of the design of Christ's death to make an atonement.*

This error is, of course, held by all who reject the divine authority of the Bible: it is held also by many who profess, in some sense, to acknowledge its claims to inspiration. The former class deny the necessity of an atonement; but regarding the Bible as a mere human production, neither ask nor care whether it contains the doctrine or not. The latter class, in common with the former, assert that an atonement was not necessary; but they go farther, and also assert that this doctrine is not found in the Bible. Before you receive this error, you ought to be able satisfactorily to answer the following inquiries.

How could God grant an absolute pardon to the sinner, and yet maintain the dignity of his character and government? The law which God has given to man as a rule of conduct, is perfectly holy, both in its requisitions and in its penalty. But man, by not obeying the requisitions of the law, has become obnoxious to its penalty. Suppose now that the great Lawgiver and Judge should remit the offence, without any expression of his displeasure against it; in what attitude must he place himself, in view of the intelligent universe? Would not the question be agitated in every part of the creation in which the fact was known—why an infinitely wise and holy God should make a law to be trampled upon with impunity; and if it were fit that the law should be made, why it were not also fit that its honor should be maintained? Is it an

expression of infinite holiness, to let sin go unpunished? Is it an expression of infinite wisdom or benevolence, to connive at a spirit of rebellion in one part of the universe, and thus to hold out encouragement to the same spirit in every other part of it? If these questions must be answered in the negative, then I ask, whether Reason herself knows any other alternative, than that an atonement must be made, or the sinner must perish?

Again: *If Jesus Christ did not die as an atoning sacrifice, whence the connexion between the ancient sacrifices and the pardon of sin?* That such a connexion existed under the Mosaic dispensation, no person who reads the Bible can doubt; victims were constantly offered under the name of sin-offerings, as an atonement for the sins of the people. That there is no natural connexion between the slaying of an animal, and the forgiveness of sin, is obvious; and moreover, the apostle expressly declares that "the blood of bulls and of goats cannot take away sin." Whence, then, did these sacrifices derive either their significance or their efficacy, if they are not to be considered as types of the great sacrifice of Christ?

Moreover: *How will you reconcile it with infinite wisdom, that God should have employed means so disproportioned in their importance to the end which he designed to accomplish?* If the object of Christ's death were to make atonement for sin, then here was an end to be answered of sufficient magnitude to warrant the most expensive means that could be employed. But if he lived merely as a teacher, and died merely as a martyr, whence the wonderful preparation that was made for his advent and his death; and whence the wonderful interest which these events have excited, both on earth and in heaven? Why this constant reference to the Messiah in all the rites of the ancient dispensation? Why was he the burden of prophecy, during a period of four thousand years? Why was his birth celebrated by the songs of angels, and his death signalized by the convulsions of

nature? If his object had been merely to instruct the world, and to seal the truth of his testimony with his blood; could not this object have been effected by some lower personage than him who was the Brightness of the Father's glory: and if this were so, whence the mighty difference between him and his apostles, which should invest his life and death with so much more importance than theirs? Whence is it too that his death awakens so much wonder, and gratitude, and joy, in heaven; that even the angels make it the theme of their high praises; if, after all, no higher object was gained by it than to prove himself sincere in preaching an improved system of moral virtue? I ask, again, whence this wonderful disproportion between means and ends, which there actually is, if Jesus Christ did not die a vicarious sacrifice for the sins of the world?

And finally, under this article, *what explanation will you give of the following passages of scripture, consistent with a rejection of the doctrine of atonement?*

"Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." "He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." "Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past through the forbearance of God." "Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree." "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins; according to the riches of his grace." "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." "Unto Him that loved us, and

washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever, amen."

These are some of the more prominent passages in which the design of Christ's death is exhibited: Which of them all, let me ask, even seem to teach, that he died merely, or chiefly, as a martyr to the truth of his doctrines? If the doctrine of atonement is not explicitly taught here, we ask for language in which it can be conveyed intelligibly.

3. Another error to which young people, at the present day, are exposed, is, that *a spiritual renovation, or radical change of character, is not necessary to salvation.*

But what is implied in salvation? Nothing less than being admitted to a participation of the joys of Heaven. But what is the character of heavenly joys? They are perfectly holy: nothing that defileth can ever enter the kingdom. What sort of taste or disposition, then, must be necessary in order to relish or participate these joys? Undoubtedly, a perfectly holy one; for the very idea of happiness includes in it a correspondence between the taste of the individual, and the objects or pursuits from which the happiness is derived. You might, for instance, bring the most delicious food before a man whose taste was vitiated by disease; and though the food would be good in itself, and would be grateful to a healthy appetite, yet to the sick man it would only be an occasion of loathing. So also in reference to the joys of Heaven—though they are not only real, but far surpass in extent all our conceptions, yet, in order that they may become ours, we must possess a temper conformed to them. But does man, by nature, possess this temper? Let every man's experience answer. Let the history of the world answer. Above all, let the word of God answer. "Every imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."

"They are altogether become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no not one." "The natural man discerneth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." If such be the natural character of man, and such the nature of heavenly joys, is it not manifest, even on principles of reason, that a radical change is necessary to the sinner, before he can be admitted to Heaven?

Hear now the *direct testimony of God* on this subject. By the mouth of his prophet Ezekiel, he says: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." "But as many as received him," says the apostle John, "to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." Our Saviour himself declares, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The apostle Paul having described the exceedingly depraved character of the Corinthians previous to their conversion, says, in reference to the change they had experienced: "But ye are washed, ye are justified, ye are sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." And again: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." What meaning having the semblance of plausibility, can you attach to these passages, if you deny that they teach the necessity of a radical change wrought by the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit, in order to salvation?

4. The fourth and only remaining error which I shall here notice, is, that *either no punishment, or only a limited one, awaits the wicked in a future world.*

If you say that *the wicked are not to be punished at all in a future state*, you must maintain the position either on the ground that they will cease to sin at death, or else that the connexion between sin and misery will be dissolved. Will you take the former ground, and say that the wicked at death are delivered from all sin? But by what means is this accomplished? Is it by death itself? No; for death is only a termination of the animal functions—a mere passage from one world to another; and surely there is nothing in this that can affect the moral state of the soul in any way. But do you say that it is by a divine influence, operating upon the soul in the action of death? You say this without any warrant; for the Bible has given no such intimation. But if it *be* so, this influence is either exerted in consistency with man's moral nature, or it is not. If it *is* thus exerted, then of course the sinner must be conscious, in some measure, of those moral exercises which precede and attend regeneration; must be conscious of co-operating with the Spirit of God, both in conviction and conversion. But this surely is not true; for, in a multitude of instances, the sinner dies in stupidity, or delirium, and sometimes in the act of challenging the vengeance of God. If you say that this influence is *not* exerted according to the laws of our moral nature, then, in respect to this point at least, you make man a mere machine: you have gone over to fatalism, and are not to be reasoned with.

But do you choose the other side of the alternative, and take the ground that the connexion between sin and misery will not exist after death? But here again, as there is nothing in death to destroy the existence of sin in the soul, neither is there any thing in it to change its nature. It is part of the nature of sin to produce misery, just as truly as it belongs to the sun to impart light; and though this tendency is not always manifest in the present life, yet it is only on account of the countervailing influences which grow out of our present condition. Just in pro-

portion as the sinner is removed from these influences even here, you see him reaping a harvest of wretchedness. As he will be completely removed from them in a future world, what can prevent sin from having its legitimate operation in making him completely wretched?

But perhaps you admit that there is a degree of punishment in a future world, but maintain that *it will be limited in its duration*. The idea that an immortal soul should be doomed to suffer inconceivable wo, during its whole existence, is so dreadful, that *you shrink from the admission of it*.

And what then? Is that any reason why you should reject the plain testimony of God? Let it be remembered that this is a case in respect to which the wishes of men have nothing to do. The grand question in relation to it is, not what you desire to be true, but what actually is true. The criminal on the scaffold no doubt wishes to see his sentence remitted; but that wish has no influence to prevent the executioner from doing his office. Not more does the dread which is associated in your mind with the idea of eternal punishment, constitute any evidence against its reality.

But you say, perhaps, that it would not consist with the *benevolence* of God to inflict eternal punishment for the sins committed in this short life. Let it be remembered that we are but miserable judges in this matter. Is it consistent with God's infinite benevolence to bury the ship, laden with human beings, in the mighty deep; or to cause the earth to open, and swallow up thousands, whom we are accustomed to call innocent? None but the atheist will deny this; for such events actually do take place under his administration. By what superhuman wisdom, then, are you enabled to decide that the eternal punishment of the sinner cannot consist with infinite benevolence? Whence have you gained that knowledge of the exact influence of sin on God's moral universe, which qualifies you to pronounce that its punishment must be limited, or his perfection must be sacrificed?

But if the punishment of the sinner *is* hereafter to come to a termination, *in what manner is this to be effected?* Do you say that his sufferings will be *disciplinary;* and that in consequence of their reforming and purifying influence, he will ere long be prepared for the happiness of heaven? Here again, this is a gratuitous assumption—no such influence being attributed to the sufferings of the wicked in the word of God. But this notion is moreover contradicted by the analogy of experience. Would the parent, if he wished to reform an abandoned child, be likely to confine him constantly to the company of those who were equally or even more abandoned than himself? And is it not true in fact, that when the wicked in the present life have been doomed for their crimes by the sentence of human law, to confinement with those of a character similar to their own, they have generally come away monuments, not of the reforming, but of the corrupting and hardening influence of such kind of punishment? Where then is the ground for believing that the wicked in a future world, by being associated with those who continually blaspheme God, and oppose the interests of his kingdom, will become conformed to his image, and acquire a relish for his service?

Admitting, however, this remedial tendency which you attribute to the sufferings of the sinner, you have yet another difficulty to surmount—it is *to determine how the sinner can be delivered from punishment in consistency with the sentence of God's law.* The only alternative that here presents itself is, either that he has actually suffered the full penalty of the law, and is released on the score of justice; or else that his deliverance is effected through the efficacy of Christ's atonement. But both sides of this alternative are mere assumptions—not warranted even by the semblance of scripture authority; and as for reason, if she has any thing to say concerning them, it is certainly nothing in their favor. But against both these suppositions, as well as against that of the

disciplinary tendency of the sufferings of the wicked, there stands arrayed that *mass of divine testimony*, which exhibits the present world as the only world of probation, and the future as a world of unalterable retribution. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do," says Solomon, "do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave"—the world of departed spirits—"whither thou goest." Says the prophet Isaiah, "They that go down into the grave, cannot hope for thy truth." "The night cometh," saith our Saviour, that is, the night of death, "in which no man can work." As there is to be no change in the character of man after he leaves this world, the scriptures teach that we shall be judged according to "the deeds done in the body;" and rewarded "according to our works," performed on this side the grave. It is clear then that the Bible has decided that, neither on the ground of justice, nor on the ground of mercy, will the punishment of the sinner be remitted, after he has become an inhabitant of the eternal world.

But there are many other passages of scripture, in which the doctrine of eternal punishment is not only implied, but *explicitly declared*. The prophet Isaiah, filled with the most awful impressions of the future state of the wicked, exclaims, "Who can inhabit *everlasting* burnings?" Our blessed Lord himself, speaking of the wicked, says, "These shall go away into *everlasting* punishment." Paul says concerning those who obey not the gospel, that "they shall be punished with *everlasting* destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power." And John, in the Revelation, declares concerning the inhabitants of the bottomless pit, that "the smoke of their torment ascendeth up *for ever and ever*."

But you will say, perhaps, that the words "everlasting," "eternal," "for ever and ever," &c. *do not necessarily imply unlimited duration*, as they are sometimes

used in scripture in reference to objects whose duration is acknowledged to be limited. To this I reply that, whatever this language may denote in certain cases, the manner in which it is used as descriptive of the punishment of the wicked, precludes the idea of limited duration; for the same language which expresses the duration of the miseries of the wicked, is employed in the very same connexion, to express that of the happiness of the righteous; which all acknowledge to be unlimited.—"Some shall arise to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal"—or "everlasting life;" the same Greek word being used in the latter case as in the former. Here then is an example of the strongest expressions to be found in the Greek and Hebrew languages, being used by the Spirit of God, and in circumstances in no way liable to exception, to describe the duration of future punishment. The only alternative which these passages suggest is, either that the miseries of the wicked will be strictly eternal, or else that the happiness of the righteous will be limited.

If, however, after all, you choose not to admit the passages already quoted as decisive on this point, there are *others not liable to the criticism to which I have referred*, and which undoubtedly convey the idea of unlimited duration, if it can be conveyed by human language. Such are the following: "Their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched." "They shall never see life." "They shall never enter into rest." "It were good for that man if he had never been born." Surely it would have been better for Judas to have been born, if, after suffering millions of ages, he should finally begin an endless career of happiness and glory.

There is yet another test to which the doctrine which I am considering may very properly be referred. I mean its *moral tendency:* for it requires no argument to prove

that that doctrine which removes any of the restraints to sinful indulgence, cannot have God for its author.

Now then I inquire, if there be no punishment, or only a temporary punishment, for the wicked, in a future world—in other words, if virtue and vice are ultimately to find the same level,—I inquire what there is to keep a wicked man from any deeds of iniquity to which his inclinations may prompt him, provided only he can escape the eye and the arm of human law. The wretch whose ruling passion is the love of gold, casts his eye covetously upon your possessions; but they are so guarded that he cannot reach them without shedding your blood: what hinders then, if death be the gate of glory to all, but that, when he has once satisfied himself that he can escape detection, he should draw his dagger and stab you in the dark? Nor is the penalty of human law, upon his principle, greatly to be dreaded, or even dreaded at all; for it is only anticipating a little, a momentary pang, which is after all the harbinger of eternal joy. Is it not then manifestly the tendency of this doctrine, to throw open the flood-gates of iniquity, and to license to the utmost, every corrupt propensity of the heart?

You perceive then, my young friends, that you have most serious difficulties to encounter from reason, scripture, and experience, before you can adopt either scheme of universal salvation. Be not so unwise as to yield to the dictates of mere feeling on this subject. It is a matter, I repeat, to be decided, not by the wishes of men, but by the testimony of God. To this then, as the ultimate source of evidence, be your appeal; and if the doctrine is taught here, that the punishment of the wicked will be eternal, remember that heaven and earth shall sooner pass away, than one jot or tittle of what Jehovah has threatened shall fail of being accomplished.

II. I have now completed the examination which I designed, of some of the more common errors to which

young people, at the present day, are exposed: I proceed, secondly, TO SUGGEST SOME CONSIDERATIONS WITH A VIEW TO DISSUADE YOU FROM BEING FOUND IN THE WAY OF EVIL INSTRUCTION. The wise man, in the text, cautions the young, not merely to avoid *giving heed* to the instruction of the wicked, but to avoid even *hearing* it. "Cease, my son, *to hear* the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge." The idea clearly is, that you are not to allow yourselves, in any way, to be familiar with corrupt sentiments; neither by reading bad books, nor by listening to the preaching or conversation of bad men.

1. The first consideration which I shall offer, as a reason why you should not be found in the way of evil instruction, is, that *there is great danger that you will embrace the errors with which you thus become acquainted.*

This danger results partly from the fact that *men naturally love darkness rather than light.* Of this fact the history of the world furnishes abundant proof; else how will you account for it, not only that men in all ages have misinterpreted the voice of God speaking to them in his works and ways, and that they have worshipped every thing as God but Jehovah himself, but also that so many have shut their eyes against the broad light of revelation, and have either denied its divine authority, or else perverted it to sanction the most gross and fatal errors. Taking for granted then this fact, it amounts to nothing less than a predisposition in the human heart to the reception of error. Suppose your bodily system was exactly predisposed to some contagious disease, would not that fact greatly increase your danger, on being brought into contact with the elements of infection? Or suppose an individual had a strong thirst for intoxicating liquors, would not this invest with additional danger all opportunities for indulging in the use of them? Is it not equally manifest that that natural aversion to

the reception of God's truth, of which I have spoken, must be peculiarly favorable to the influence of evil instruction?

But this danger farther arises from *the love of novelty, and the pride of opinion.* There is something exceedingly grateful to many youthful minds, in the reflection that they have turned off from the beaten track;—that they have escaped from vulgar prejudices, and broken away from the trammels of education, and that they are giving the world a fine example of independent thought. But this spirit finds but little aliment in the way of truth; for that is a highway, and the simple and unlettered walk in it; and the way to be distinguished from the vulgar herd, is to leave this plain path, and broach some wild or wicked speculation. More or less of this spirit no doubt belongs to human nature; and though you may not hitherto have been sensible of its operation, yet if you venture into the way of evil instruction, there is great danger that you will find, not only that this spirit exists, but that it exerts a powerful influence in opening your mind to the reception of error.

Moreover, you are in danger of embracing the errors which you accustom yourselves to hear defended, from the fact that *familiarity with error, as with vice, has a tendency to make you insensible of its deformity.* This tendency results partly from the power of habit, and partly from the deceitful nature of sin; and it exists universally; though it must be acknowledged that it is often counteracted by the influence of circumstances. The process by which it discovers itself, needs only to be described, to be recognized by every one as a reality. The youth who has been educated to reverence the bible as God's word, when he first hears it assailed by infidel cavils and scoffs, shudders at the impiety, and perhaps wonders that God suffers such a wretch to live. He hears the same thing the second time, but with less horror than before. He hears it again and again, and at

length ceases to be affected by the impiety. At no distant period, he gathers bravery enough to smile at what once made him tremble; to assent to that, which once drew from him expressions of abhorrence. At a more remote point in the process, he cordially takes the infidel by the hand, and greets him as a brother; thus, perhaps, in a little period, having travelled the whole distance from a firm belief to a total rejection of the bible. Say, my young friends, whether all this is not perfectly natural; and easily accounted for on the principle that familiarity with error blinds the mind to its inherent odiousness. Venture not then in the way of evil instruction, lest, through the operation of the same principle, you should be the subjects of the same disastrous change.

Another consideration which renders it probable that you will embrace the errors which you hear defended, is, that, *from your age and inexperience, you cannot be supposed to be properly furnished for an encounter with error.* The man who, when properly armed, might stand his ground against a company of ruffians, would, if stripped of his armor, fall into their hands at the first onset. In like manner, the man who has been long accustomed to study his bible, might find little difficulty, and be in little danger, in meeting the cavils of the enemies of truth; while he who is comparatively unacquainted with the word of God, might be easily entangled, and drawn away by their sophistry. Taking it for granted then that you have not that deep and thorough knowledge of the bible which might more naturally be looked for in advanced life, you cannot but perceive that you are in great danger, from this circumstance, of receiving the errors which are defended in your hearing. Cavils which might be satisfactorily answered in many ways, and the fallacy of which a more thorough knowledge of the word of God might enable you instantly to detect, assume, from your ignorance, the weight of ar-

guments ; and there is danger that you will soon come to conclude that what *you* cannot answer, is unanswerable.

But the consideration which crowns the evidence of your danger on this subject, is, that *multitudes of youth, from hearing evil instruction, actually have embraced the errors with which they have thus been made familiar.* Yes, I could point you to many a young person, who thought himself safe when he ventured on this forbidden ground, and felt confident that his belief of the truth was never to be shaken, who can now speak boldly in defence of the most dangerous errors, and even pour contempt on the revelation of God. Tell me, my young friends, what there is in your circumstances which promises that the same experiment will result more favorably in respect to you. Rely on it, that ground which your curiosity may tempt you to explore, is beset with snares ; if you venture among them, take heed lest they prove to you the snares of death.

2. Guard against being found in the way of evil instruction, because there is great danger that you will not only by this means embrace error, but *that you will retain it till the close of life.*

There are two principles which will operate powerfully towards such a result. The first is, *the pride of consistency.* The circumstances in which the error is supposed to be embraced, are exceedingly well fitted to bring this principle into action. You have become an errorist under the teaching of wicked men, who have watched you in every step of your progress, who have triumphed in their success, and have congratulated you on being set free from puritanical prejudices. In your intercourse with them and with others, you have probably gloried in your opposition to the truth ; for it usually happens that the truth finds its bitterest enemies in the ranks of apostacy. How difficult then must it be to come down from this high stand which you have taken,

into the dust; to acknowledge, after all your confident boasting, that you have been left to believe a lie! How hard to bear the taunting accusation of fickleness or hypocrisy; to be assailed by the hiss of contempt, instead of being greeted with the smile of approbation! If you have embraced error in the circumstances to which I have referred, is not here a powerful consideration to prevent you from abandoning it? Even if doubts should sometimes force themselves upon you, is it not probable that this pride of consistency—this fear of the world's dread laugh, would lead you to shake them off as soon as possible?

The other principle to which I referred as likely to operate in preventing you from abandoning your errors, when they are once adopted, is *a regard to present comfort*. No matter from what consideration you may have been induced to receive them—when once received, they will of course exert an influence to quiet the conscience, and thus minister to a life of sin. The man who speculatively believes the great truths of the Bible, has but little to defend him against the arrows of conviction. When the threatenings of God are thundered in his ears, conscience is exceedingly apt to take advantage of his belief, to stir up tumult and agony in his heart. But the man who has embraced any fundamental error, carries a shield upon his conscience, which the sharpest arrows from the quiver of the Almighty can scarcely penetrate. He is at ease under the preaching of the word, under the warnings of Providence, in revivals of religion, and is even mighty to oppose the operations of God's Holy Spirit: but take from him his system of error, and you strip him of the armor in which he trusted; you leave him as liable to the terrors of conviction, as other men. But in every human bosom there is a natural dread of misery; especially in the bosom of the sinner, a dread of finding himself exposed to the wrath of God. How probable is it then, on this ground, that if you have once yielded

to the influence of error, you will never abandon it. It produces a feeling of safety which you love to cherish; whereas the parting with it must be the signal for a painful sense of exposure to the most awful calamities.

I have said that there is a probability that a system of error once adopted will be retained till the close of life: perhaps I ought rather to say till *near the close;*—for experience proves that the approach of death has a mighty influence to break up these delusions. Cases indeed occur, in which the soul clings to them to the last, and even with apparent triumph; but the instances are far more numerous, in which the most honest confessions, and the most gloomy forebodings, pronounce these systems of error to be refuges of lies. But this conviction is often—perhaps usually, nothing more than the conviction of despair. The soul, just in the act of making its change—though it may abandon the error, is not in a condition to escape from its influence; and hence it may be said in the most important and practical sense, that those by whom error is once received, will probably carry it with them to the gates of eternity.

3. Guard against being found in the way of evil instruction, because the errors to which you are thus exposed, if adopted, and retained till the close of life, *must be fatal to your souls.* I here refer particularly to those errors which have been examined in the former part of this discourse, though they are by no means the only ones of fatal tendency.

Let it be remembered that these errors are, in the highest degree, *practical.* There are many false notions, and even in respect to religion, which may be held with little or no hazard; because they are at best mere matters of speculation, and do not involve any great point of duty or interest. But it is otherwise in respect to those which we have been considering: they contemplate man in his relations to God and eternity; and involve interests too

momentous for the human mind adequately to estimate. I know there are those who will have it, that nothing is practical in religion, but what relates to external morality and to the present life; but surely those are the most practical truths, in the only proper sense of that word, which are fitted to exert the greatest influence in preparing men for heaven; and those the most practical errors, which minister most directly and effectually to the soul's everlasting destruction.

But the fatal influence of the errors of which I have spoken, is more directly manifest in the fact, that *they either sweep away the only foundation of the sinner's hope, or else they effectually prevent a compliance with the terms on which salvation is offered.* If you believe that the Bible is not the word of God, then you set at nought all that God has done for your salvation, and fairly bring yourself under the sentence, "He that believeth not shall be damned." If you believe that Jesus Christ has made no atonement for sin, it were absurd to suppose that you should ever rest your soul's everlasting interests on his atonement; and yet this is the only sure foundation. If you believe neither the reality nor the necessity of a renovation of heart by the Holy Spirit, what motive will you have to seek it? But Jesus himself has declared, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." And finally, if you believe that there is to be no punishment, or only a limited punishment, of the wicked in a future world, what influence will this belief be likely to exert, other than that to which I have already referred; that of quieting your fears, and encouraging you to walk the downward road? I do not say that it is not possible but that the tendency of this latter doctrine may, in individual instances, be counteracted; but we may safely say that, if such instances exist, they are exceedingly rare; and that this error has generally a most direct and visible influence in carrying the soul down to perdition.

And is it so, my young friends, that the errors to which you are exposed are fraught with such amazing danger? Is it so, that every effort made to corrupt your principles, is an effort to destroy your souls? Then venture not into the way of evil instruction. Regard with more horror the man who would shake your belief in the truths of religion, than the assassin who waits to plunge a dagger into your heart. The one aims only at the death of the body, which must die soon in the course of nature: the other aims at the death of the soul;—a death fraught with everlasting agony. If you are tempted to place yourself, even for an hour, in the way of hearing the truths of the bible ridiculed or opposed, yield not to the temptation, unless you have made up your mind to encounter the agonies of the lost.

And now what remains but that I exhort you to *value and love the Bible?* Be not satisfied with a vague and inoperative assent to its authority or its doctrines; but let your belief in both be intelligent and influential. Study it daily with diligence and prayer. Endeavor not only to become familiar with its truths, but to become imbued with its spirit. Bind it about your heart, as the richest treasure that God has ever given to mortals. In this way, you will early become fortified against the influence of evil instruction; will have a sure guide amidst difficulties, a substantial solace in sorrow, an unfailing refuge in death. Give me the directions which the bible furnishes, and I will ask for no other guide amidst the devious paths of human life. Give me the consolations which the bible yields, and I will ask for no other staff to support me when I go down into the dark valley.

LECTURE IV.

DANGER OF A LIFE OF PLEASURE.

ECCLESIASTES XI. 9.

REJOICE, O YOUNG MAN, IN THY YOUTH; AND LET THY HEART CHEER THEE IN THE DAYS OF THY YOUTH; AND WALK IN THE WAYS OF THINE HEART, AND IN THE SIGHT OF THINE EYES: BUT KNOW THOU, THAT FOR ALL THESE THINGS, GOD WILL BRING THEE INTO JUDGMENT.

A MORE cutting and awful piece of irony than is contained in this passage, is, perhaps, not to be found, either in or out of the sacred volume. The wise man, in the first part of the verse, assumes the character of a gay and thoughtless libertine; and in the true spirit of a libertine, counsels the youth whom he is addressing, to give himself up to an unrestrained course of amusement and dissipation. He bids him abandon all serious thoughts of God, and eternity, and religion. He welcomes him to the joys of an irreligious and profligate life; and gives him all the liberty which any sensualist could desire. Having so far represented the wicked seducer and destroyer of the young, he suddenly lays aside his assumed character, and with all the solemnity of a preacher from the world of spirits, closes the verse, in a style of the most impressive admonition. The same young person, whom he had just before pointed into the path of forbidden pleasure, he now points to the judgment seat of Christ; and

alludes, with awful emphasis, to that tremendous reckoning, which must succeed such a life as he had recommended. "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth; and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment."

Our subject, at once, lays itself before you. In the first part of the text, there is the IRONICAL INVITATION to partake of sinful pleasure: in the latter part, the SOLEMN ADMONITION to remember the judgment. Let us endeavor, so far as we can, to enter into the spirit of both parts of the passage.

"Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth; and walk in the ways of thine heart, and the sight of thine eyes:"—almost the very language by which many youth at the present day are tempted into the path of forbidden pleasure. Coming from the lips of the sensualist, it is no irony; it is the honest language of his heart; and he rejoices when it is listened to and obeyed.

Hear the sentiment contained in these words, a little expanded:—"You are now in the morning of life—the season most free from worldly care, and most adapted to worldly pleasure. However it may be with middle life, or old age, when the vigor of the body is spent, or the animal spirits have grown cool, this is not the time for religion. You were made to enjoy life; but religion is only a course of mortification and penance; it is the bondage both of soul and body—the grave of all that is bright and goodly in the lot of man. Resist, then, the claims of religion, at least for the present. If you should think it meet to beckon her to you in your last hour, as a companion through the dark valley, be it so; but while these years of youthful buoyancy are passing off, make no league with this damper of human joy. Come with us into these scenes of mirth and revelry, in which reflection is

drowned, and restraint is not known; and here let your heart be surfeited with pleasure. What if, after having devoted hours to amusement, the thought should occur to you, while in the solitude of your chamber, that all that you had enjoyed was vanity? Endeavor to convince yourself of the contrary, by thinking how happy you were while you were listening to the festive song, or while you were dancing to the sound of the viol. What if the open grave of some beloved friend should bring into your mind the gloomy thought of dying? Banish it as an intruder upon the joys of life; and think how useless it is to trouble yourself about what is inevitable. What if the thought should occur to you, while at the gaming table, or in scenes of profane and boisterous riot, that you have beloved friends who would weep blood, if they should know where you are, and how you are engaged? But what right have friends to abridge your pleasure, so long as you are willing that they should judge what is best for themselves, and you attempt no interference with their plans for enjoyment? In a word, let it be your grand object to drink as deeply at the fountain of worldly pleasure, as you can; and as the hours of this golden season whirl off, let there be no inquiry agitated in your breast more gloomy, than how you shall crowd into each hour the largest amount of careless gaiety or sensual indulgence."

But, my young friends, I dare not proceed farther in this strain of irony, which is suggested by my text, lest some of you should forget that it *is* irony, and should begin to think that you have found an advocate for your youthful vanities. I pass therefore immediately to the other part of the subject, in which I am to enforce the AWFUL WARNING contained in the closing part of the text. "But know thou, that for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment." What an awful contrast is here presented to the language of the libertine, to which we have just been attending!

Reflect on the *certainty* of your being brought into judgment. "Know thou," says the wise man; that is, "be assured that the fact of which I speak, shall take place, without the possibility of failure." God has not left himself without witness on this subject, either in the constitution of our nature, or in the dispensations of his providence. The doctrine of a future judgment is written more or less legibly on the conscience of every man; else, how will you account for that painful restlessness which attends the remembrance of crimes long since committed, and the record of which is kept only in the perpetrator's own bosom? Moreover, the unequal distribution of rewards and punishments in the present life, in connexion with the immutable justice of God, seems to constitute a ground of necessity for a future retribution; for in what other way shall the divine character be vindicated from the charge of partiality? But if reason has not spoken with sufficient distinctness on this subject, you cannot say that of the lively oracles; for here the doctrine stands written with God's own finger in letters of light. The text is decisive on this subject:—"For all these things, God will bring thee into judgment." And again: "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." And again: "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

The evidence that you are to be brought into judgment, then, is complete. Whether you take counsel of reason, or hold communion with conscience, or open the volume of God's truth, this evidence glares upon you. Forget it you may; trifle with it you may; but the awful fact you cannot change. I charge you then to remember, wherever you go, or whatever you do, that there is a tremendous reckoning before you. Go, if you dare, into the haunts of irreligious mirth, and hear God's name profaned, and

join in heaping scandal upon the cross ; go and hear the scoffer ask, " Where is the promise of his coming ?" and let your heart overflow with sensual joy : but remember that other scenes await you ; remember that it has gone out of the mouth of Him who is " the same yesterday, to-day, and forever," that you are yet to be brought into judgment.

Contemplate the *purpose* for which you are to be brought into judgment :—" For all these things," says the wise man ; that is, the things specified in the preceding part of the verse—giving yourself up to a life of vanity and pleasure. You will be brought into judgment for the waste of your time ; for every hour and moment which shall have been devoted to other purposes than those for which your time was given you. You will be brought into judgment for all your profane and idle discourse, which was fitted at once to affront your Maker, and to pollute your own mind, and close it against serious reflection. You will be brought into judgment for every scene of vain amusement ; for every meeting for sensual excess ; for every effort to stifle conscience and forget God. You will be brought into judgment for all that you have done in corrupting others ; for the deadly poison which has distilled from your lips, and from your example, operating like the blast of death, wherever it has been communicated ; for that fearful amount of sin and wretchedness which will have resulted from the accumulating influence of your life on many successive generations. In a word, for all that belongs to a life of pleasure, whether it respect action or enjoyment, its more immediate or more remote influences, you will be brought into judgment.

How differently will a life of sinful pleasure appear to you, when you come to view it in the light of the judgment, from what it does now, while your heart cheers you in the days of your youth ! What you here plead for as innocent, will then be seen to have involved crimson

guilt. What you here regard as fraught with no danger, will there be felt to have contained the elements of a heavy curse. What you here treat with levity as though it were a dream or a fable, will there gather all the importance that belongs to an appalling reality. How will your heart sicken, and your spirit die within you, when the light of eternity reveals your mistake in respect to the object of the present life! With what emotions will you realize that the period which you have spent in trifling, was the only period given you to escape hell and to obtain heaven!

Consider, farther, *by whom* you are to be brought into judgment. The text asserts that "God will bring thee into judgment;"—God, from whom came all the blessings which you have perverted to purposes of sinful pleasure; and against whom every sin that you have committed, has been an act of rebellion:—God, whose heart-searching eye has always been intent upon you, noticing the birth, and progress, and accomplishment of every sinful purpose; who has been with you when you supposed yourself alone; and who has kept an exact record of all that you have thought, and spoken, and done, from the first moment of your existence:—God, who, though long-suffering and gracious, is yet just and holy, and will by no means clear the guilty; who has all the means of punishment in the universe at his command, and can execute with infinite ease the penalty which his righteous authority ordains. And is this the great and awful Being, who is to bring you into judgment? Say, whether it will not be a fearful thing to fall into the hands of such a Judge?

Were your final retribution to be decided by a mere man, or a mere creature, you might suppose it possible that you should escape the woes which hang over your eternal destiny. You might hope something from his limited knowledge. Possibly he might not be acquainted with all your transgressions in all their aggravating cir-

cumstances ; or he might form too low an estimate of the punishment which you deserve on account of them. Or you might hope something from his limited power. You might imagine that by some combination of energy or influence which could be formed, you might either resist the mandate which should summon you to judgment, or prevent the execution of the final sentence. Or you might presume upon the triumph of mercy over justice. You might hope that some appeal could be made to the heart of the Judge, which should lead him at least to abate the severity of your doom ; even though such mitigation should tarnish his character, and weaken his government. But surely you can form no such imaginations in respect to the infinite God. You cannot hope to evade the scrutiny of his eye, or to resist the might of his arm, or to awaken a blind and indiscriminate compassion in his heart. What though you may be courageous on every other occasion, yet can your heart endure, or your hands be strong, when you shall stand before the throne of Almighty power, beneath the searching look of Omniscience, to receive a just recompense for a life wasted in sinful pleasure ?

Meditate on the *time* of your being brought into judgment. It would seem that the day of judgment, appropriately so called—the day which is to make a full revelation of the secrets of every heart, and to pour the light of a complete vindication over the character of God—is yet comparatively distant. There are purposes to be accomplished in the scheme of providence, preparatory to that august occasion, which may require the lapse of ages. Nevertheless, there is an important sense in which it may be said that the judgment is near. The world into which the soul passes at death, is a world of retribution. Whatever means God intends ever to employ to bring the sinner to repentance, have been employed previous to that period : the first gleam of light from the eternal world reveals to the soul its destiny, which, though not yet

published to the universe, is fixed by a decree which the whole creation could not change; and whatever the soul experiences, whether of joy or of wo, subsequently to that period, belongs to its everlasting retribution?

Dream not, then, my young friend, that the period of your being brought into judgment is remote. Will you presume upon youth as a security against it? So did that young man, who, the other day, was hurried into eternity, in the fulness of youthful vigor, and the bloom of youthful hope. Will you presume upon health as a security against it? Go, then, and read a lesson from yonder tomb-stone; and there you will find that a protracted sickness, and a lingering death-scene, are not the necessary accompaniments of dissolution: you will find that death may overtake you, while your hands are strung with vigor; and that your passage through the dark valley may be the passage of a moment. Or do you presume on promising worldly prospects? I could point you to many a father who would tell you weeping, that he once had a son whose prospects were, in every respect, as bright as yours; but that death had marked him as his victim, and he had sunk into an early grave. Where, then, I ask, is *your* security against being early brought into judgment? When you go into a scene of amusement, how do you know but that the summons may meet you there? When you mingle in the midnight revel, can you be certain that you are not passing the last hour of your probation? When you lay your head upon your pillow, without lifting your heart to God, *who* has given you the assurance that that is not the night in which your soul is to be required of you; that a voice from eternity may not break upon your ear amidst the stillness of midnight, calling you to judgment? But be it so that you should fill up threescore years and ten, it would still remain true that you are on the threshold of the judgment. That period—long as it may now seem to you—is but as a hand's-breadth; while you are dreaming of its conti-

nuance, it will be spent, and your spirit will be rushing forth to meet its God. And is it so, that the judgment is not only a reality, but that its amazing scenes are so soon to burst upon you? Tell me, then, O immortal soul, what account you are prepared to render of that wasted, perverted life, when you enter the invisible world, and stand before the dread tribunal?

Contemplate, moreover, the *circumstances* of your being brought into judgment. If you consider this expression as referring to the removal of the soul by death to a state of retribution, then the circumstances of this event must, in a great measure, remain concealed, till they are disclosed to you in experience. In respect to some of them, however, you may form at least a probable opinion. By the power of a burning fever, or the gradual inroads of consumption, or perhaps by some more mysterious form of disease, you may expect ere long to be laid upon the bed of death. It may be that, in that awful hour, you may be given up to delirium or insensibility, and may close your eyes upon the objects of sense without knowing where you are, or through what scenes you are passing. Or it may be that your rational powers will be active and bright, so that you will be conscious of all that happens to you in your passage through the dark valley. You may see around you beloved friends, who will alternately fasten upon you a look of mingled affection and agony, and turn away to smother the sobs which rise from a bursting heart. You may be sensible that the cold damps of death are already hanging upon your countenance; that the vital current is performing its last passage through your heart; that you are undergoing the convulsive struggle which is to dislodge the spirit from its clayey tabernacle. And supposing that your life has been devoted to sinful pleasure, how probable is it that conscience will pour its accusations into your ears, and tell you of an offended Judge, and of coming wrath, and of interminable wo! How probable that the ghosts of

wasted hours, and days, and years, will come up in frightful succession before you, as ministers of wrath, when you need so much to be attended by angels of consolation! Amidst some such assemblage of gloomy circumstances as I have now supposed, you may expect that your spirit will take its flight for the eternal world. And while your body is dressing for the grave, that spirit will be mingling in scenes of new and awful interest; and though it will have done with the agony attendant on the dissolution of the body, it will be convulsed by an agony far more dreadful—the beginning of a never-dying death. Oh what a moment will that be, when you shall first know by experience the misery of the lost!

But if you consider the text as referring immediately to the great day of final decision, the circumstances which will attend your being brought into judgment, will be of a far different character from those which we have just described; and while, in the former case, we learn them principally from observation, in the latter, we derive our knowledge solely from the oracles of God. At the hour next previous to that in which the immediate preparation for the judgment shall commence, your body, dissolved into its original elements, will be slumbering with its kindred dust; and your spirit will be mingling with other lost spirits in the region of despair. Suddenly the skies will send forth a sound—it will be a blast of the trump of God, which will echo from one end of the earth to the other, bursting open the doors of every sepulchre, breaking up the slumbers of all their inhabitants, and re-collecting from the earth, the ocean, the air, the scattered dust of every child of Adam that shall have died since the creation. The union between body and spirit is restored—the same body that was laid in the dust, rises up to meet the same spirit which had animated it. The Judge descends from heaven, in the glory of his Father, and with all his holy angels; and around his throne are assembled all nations, and kindreds, and tongues, and

people. The righteous are placed in open, distinguished honor, at his right hand ; the wicked, as a public proof of his indignation against their character, are summoned to the left. In this latter class, you, who have been devoted to sinful pleasure, will be found. There you will be obliged to contemplate the picture of your life, drawn only in black, without one bright stroke to relieve the eye from a uniform and sickening gloom. There you will be obliged, with all others who have been "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God," to hear the appalling sentence, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Oh, when that piercing sound shall enter into your ear, will it not rend your heart with agony, and open your lips in wailing? For "who can stand before his indignation? And who can abide in the fierceness of his anger?"

Meditate, finally, on the *consequences* of your being brought into judgment. The consequence of your being summoned by death into a world of retribution, will be an entire separation from all the objects of sense, from all the means of grace, from all the hopes of salvation. You will remember, indeed, how you once mingled in scenes of unhallowed mirth and revelry ; but with the remembrance of these scenes will be associated the reflection that they have gone by for ever ; while the effect of them remains to be felt in an interminable scene of anguish. You will think of sabbaths given you to prepare for heaven, but perverted to purposes of mere amusement: of invitations and warnings a thousand times pressed upon you, but as often treated with indifference or contempt; of friends who had come with the tenderest concern to speak to you of the things that belonged to your peace, but who returned to their closets mourning that they could gain no access to your heart. But you will be obliged also to reflect that there are no more sabbaths for you ; that the last invitation of mercy, the last warning to repent, has died away upon your ear ;

that no christian friend can come where you are, to unburden a full heart in prayers, and tears, and expostulations, for the salvation of your soul. You may remember too, how, in all your mad pursuit of pleasure, you still clung to the hope of future repentance: but the delusion is broken up; even the atoning blood of Jesus can now no longer reach you. And while you are an exile from all the good, real or imaginary, which you once enjoyed, you will be subject to the corrosion of a guilty conscience, will be a companion of fiends and reprobates, and as you look forward into eternity, will see one wo rising after another, like the billows of the ocean, in a train that will never end.

The consequeuce of your being brought before the last tribunal, and of receiving a formal and final sentence from the lips of the Judge, will be still more tremendous. At the close of this awful transaction, you will behold, with a bewildered look of agony, all above, beneath, around, vaulted with the funereal fires of this great world; and when amidst this final wreck of nature, you look out for a refuge from the fiery storm, no refuge in the universe will be open for *you*, except that dungeon of wo in which the wrath of God is to have its perpetual operation. Into that prison of the universe, that grave of lost but living souls, you will immediately enter; and there, in the hopelessness of unavailing anguish—there, amidst the curses and wailings of the lost—there, where the eye can fasten upon no object upon which the wrath of God has not fastened before it, you must run the dreary round of everlasting ages. The sentence was, "Depart, ye cursed, into *everlasting* fire." And is it so, that this prison is built for eternity;—that these flames are kindled for eternity;—that these bolts, and bars, and chains, bespeak an eternal residence in these vaults of despair? Will not some messenger come hither from yonder blissful regions, though it be ten thousand millions of ages hence, to tell thee that this long night of suffer-

ing will yet be succeeded by a morning of peace and joy? No, sinner, there are no such tidings in store for thee: thou wert sentenced there for a period as unlimited as the duration of God; and thy sentence is irreversible.

I inquire now of the conscience of every youth present, who is devoted to sinful pleasure, whether these meditations upon the judgment do not throw an aspect of terror over the course which he is pursuing; and whether he dare persist any longer in a course which must so certainly lead to such a tremendous result? If this life of vanity and pleasure had no connexion with eternity, or if it were itself to be eternal, however pitiful a portion you might find in it, we might consent, with less reluctance, to leave you to your wretched choice: but connected as it is with a course of illimitable and unutterable suffering, wonder not that we call upon you with pressing importunity to abandon it. Do you ask whether you must abandon *all* the amusements of the world? I answer—Abandon all upon which you dare not ask the blessing of God;—all which crowd out of your thoughts the realities of eternity;—all which you are unwilling to think of in connexion with the prospect of dying—all for which you would dread that God should bring you into judgment. Do you ask, again, what those amusements are in which you may safely indulge, while you are yet unreconciled to God? I reply, by asking what amusement you would choose if you were just ready to be enveloped in the flames of a burning house; or if you were under sentence of death, and had but one hour more, before you should ascend the scaffold? Do you spurn at the suggestion of trifling in circumstances like these? Then say not that we are superstitious when we tell you that you have no time to waste in amusement, while yet your whole work for eternity is before you, and for aught you can tell, each passing hour may be your last. Do you plead for a single indulgence? Do you say, let me go into one more scene of vain recrea-

tion, and cheer my heart once more in these days of my youth, and then I will abandon the vanities of the world for ever? My young friend, the very resolution is a cheat: but even if it were not, who has told you that that one scene of recreation may not occupy the whole period given you to prepare for eternity; and that you are not subjected to the alternative of turning your back upon it, or of certainly losing heaven? Is it rational—rather is it not the height of madness, to waste a single moment, while you are suspended between an eternal heaven and an eternal hell?

I leave this solemn subject, beloved youth, with your consciences. I entreat you to make a serious and practical application of it. I pray the God of all grace to bring it seasonably to your remembrance, and give it its legitimate influence over your feelings and conduct. But if all which has been said shall appear to you as an idle tale; if, after having been warned of the solemnities of the judgment, you are prepared to rush back to a course of sinful pleasure, then I must leave you with the same awful irony, and the same solemn admonition, with which I began this discourse. "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment."

LECTURE V.

REGARD TO THE FAVOR OF THE WORLD CONTRASTED WITH A REGARD TO THE FAVOR OF GOD.

1st THESSALONIANS II. 4.

NOT AS PLEASING MEN, BUT GOD.

THE church to which this epistle was addressed, is supposed to have been planted by Paul and Silas, soon after the outrages committed upon them at Phllippi, and recorded in the sixteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. In the verses immediately preceding the text, the apostle alludes to the signal success which attended his first labors among the Thessalonians; and notices, as an occasion of rejoicing, the fact that he and his companion in labor—notwithstanding the shameful treatment they had just met in a neighboring city, and the obstacles which they still had to encounter—were enabled, in the strength of divine grace, to preach the gospel with boldness and fidelity. And what chiefly encouraged them to these courageous efforts, was the reflection that they had no mercenary purposes to answer; and that there was nothing in their management in respect to which they need shrink from the strictest scrutiny; but all was open and honest; "not as pleasing men," or as consulting the tastes and prejudices of the world, "but"

as endeavoring to secure the approbation of "God, which trieth our hearts."

The text, you perceive, has a primary reference to ministers of the gospel. And surely, if there be a class of men, in respect to whom it is pre-eminently important that they should act under the influence of the principle which the apostle here recognizes, ministers of the gospel constitute that class. But it is important that all others should be governed by this principle, as well as ministers. It is especially important that its influence should be felt by persons in the morning of life; because that is the period in which habits are formed, which, in most instances, constitute the elements of future character.

When the apostle, in our text, institutes an apparent opposition between pleasing men and pleasing God, we are not to suppose that he intends to forbid every effort to please men; for this would be inconsistent not only with many of his exhortations, but with his own conduct. "Let every one of us," saith he, "please his neighbor for his good to edification." And again: "I am made all things to all men, that I might, by all means, save some." The gospel not only allows, but requires, that we should seek the favorable regards of our fellow-men, especially, as a means of our own usefulness; and the course of conduct which it prescribes, is exactly fitted to such a result. Hence it has been said, with much truth and force, that the gospel contains the most perfect system of politeness which the world has seen.

The apostle, in our text, intends only to contrast a supreme regard to the approbation of the world, and a supreme regard to the approbation of God, *as governing principles of action;* and to imply that they are perfectly incompatible with each other.

My purpose, in this discourse, is TO ILLUSTRATE AND CONTRAST THE INFLUENCE OF THESE TWO DISPOSITIONS,

I. Upon human character:

II. Upon human happiness.

I. Upon human character.

1. I remark, in the first place, that *it is the tendency of a supreme regard to the approbation of the world, to produce a fickle character; of a supreme regard to the approbation of God, a stable one.*

Who that has any knowledge of the world, needs to be told that its maxims, principles, conduct, are constantly changing? What, at one period, is admired as elegant, or praiseworthy, soon comes to be regarded with indifference, and perhaps ultimately sinks into contempt; and on the other hand, what, at one time, is considered mean or worthless, gradually rises into respectability, and it may be, at length, becomes an object of admiration. For a complete illustration of this remark, you need only look into the walks of what is commonly called fashionable life; and you will see one fashion after another, in respect to manners, dress, equipage, and many other things, succeeding so rapidly, that even the devotees of fashion themselves are scarcely able to do homage to every new idol. Here you have a fair specimen of the fluctuation of human opinion. If then you make human opinion the standard of your conduct, and that standard is constantly varying, your conduct must of course exhibit a corresponding course of changes; and here is the foundation of a fickle character.

On the other hand, the person who seeks supremely the approbation of God, has a fixed standard of action. The law of God is *his* rule of duty; and that law, like its author, is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." He may indeed sometimes be embarrassed, in respect to particular cases, to know what this law requires and what it forbids; but, in general, it marks out for him a plain path. Hence he acts not only in conformity to a

fixed standard, but generally without hesitation; and in this way he cannot fail to acquire and to exhibit stability of character.

2. *It is the tendency of a supreme regard to the approbation of the world, to produce a timid character; of a supreme regard to the approbation of God, a courageous one.*

The devotee of the world's favor has no easy task to perform. He well knows that he must shape his conduct to suit different and opposite dispositions; that in securing the approbation of one, he is liable to lose that of another; and that the means which may seem to him best adapted to gain favor, may prove to be fraught with injury or disgrace. Besides, he has, sometimes, at least, a secret conviction that the course which he is pursuing is wrong; and that his Maker and Judge is offended that the supreme homage of his heart should be withheld from *Him*. Here, then, is a double influence exerted to produce a timid character. On the one hand, he fears that he shall not gain the object which he is seeking: on the other, he fears that, if he does gain it, it will be at the expense of what is infinitely more valuable. Is it not obvious that a character formed under such an influence, will be likely to bear a strong impression of timidity?

But in seeking supremely the favor of God, there is every thing to inspire true courage. There is the certainty of success, which is always favorable to bold and vigorous action. There is the reflection, that he whose approbation we seek, is All-gracious and Almighty; and that let the world do by us as it may, his favor is a sufficient portion. There is moreover the consideration that the course which we are pursuing is in itself the right course; the course which reason, conscience, the bible, all prescribe. Who that acts under the influence of considerations like these, can fail to act with unyielding resolution?

3. *It is the tendency of a supreme regard to the approbation of the world, to produce a hypocritical character; of a supreme regard to the approbation of God, an honest one.*

I have already remarked that, owing to the different tastes and dispositions of men, it will often happen that that course of conduct which will gain the approbation of one, will forfeit that of another; and hence he whose governing object is to please the world, will endeavor to appear to each one in such a character as he supposes will be most likely to secure regard; and to conceal from each one whatever he thinks will serve to excite displeasure. If he happens to fall in with one who is a warm advocate of any particular measure, the desire of popularity will naturally lead him to appear as an advocate of it also; or if he happens to be in the company of another by whom the same measure is opposed, the same desire will operate to induce him, if not to join in opposition to the measure, at least, to say nothing in its favor. In this way he contracts the habit of dissimulation; and his whole intercourse becomes a system of studied concealment.

But on the other hand, he who is governed by a supreme regard to the favor of God, has no motive to depart from the path of open and honest dealing. If he were to do this, he would instantly defeat his object; for not the approbation, but the frown, of Jehovah, attends all insincerity. Moreover, the course which he is pursuing, neither involves guilt nor awakens shame: there is therefore no reason why he should attempt to conceal his conduct from his fellow-men, or why he should desire to conceal it from his Maker. Hence his character bears upon it the impression of truth and honesty.

4. *It is the tendency of a supreme regard to the approbation of the world to produce an inconsistent character; of a supreme regard to the approbation of God, a consistent one.*

As he who is governed by a supreme regard to the favor of the world has no fixed rule of action, but is blown hither and thither by the breath of popular opinion, the different parts of his conduct must, of course, be inconsistent with each other. As the opinions of different individuals whom he wishes to please, are at variance, there must be a corresponding variance between the courses of conduct which he adopts in different cases, in order to gain his object; and hence his life is a perpetual scene of contradictions. And if he happens to be a professor of religion, he is chargeable with a double inconsistency; for not only are the different parts of his conduct inconsistent with each other, but his deportment as a whole, is utterly inconsistent with his profession; for in his profession is implied an engagement to make the will of God, and not the opinions of men, the rule of his conduct. Most of the inconsistency that attaches itself to the characters of professed christians, and I may add—of all others, results, no doubt, from an improper desire to please the world.

But he who acts from a supreme regard to the approbation of God, cannot fail to exhibit a consistent character. The rule by which his conduct is governed, requires that every duty should be done in its proper place; and in adhering to this, his character, in its different parts, acquires a beautiful consistency and harmony, which it could acquire under no other influence. Such a person will not, on the one hand, neglect his retired duties—the duties of secret prayer, and reading the scriptures, and self-communion, for the sake of being constantly engaged in public religious exercises; nor, on the other hand, will he excuse himself from the more public services of religion, on the ground that he is regular in the duties of the closet. He will not substitute works for faith, nor faith for works, but will exhibit both in bright and beautiful combination. He whose favor he seeks, requires that he should cultivate all the virtues

and graces of the christian; and if he fail in respect to any, he so far incurs the divine displeasure. Hence his character is consistent with itself; and if he be a professed follower of Christ, it is consistent with his profession.

Once more: *It is the tendency of a supreme regard to the approbation of the world to produce an unholy character; of a supreme regard to the approbation of God, a holy one.*

It is the decision of inspiration, that "the whole world lieth in wickedness;" and what the bible teaches on this subject, observation abundantly confirms. It is only necessary to look abroad into the world, to be satisfied that the maxims, the feelings, the practices, that generally prevail in it, are directly opposed to the spiritual and holy requisitions of God's word. He, therefore, who makes the approbation of the world his supreme object, must expect that his character will, in this respect also, take the stamp of the mould in which it is cast. Moreover, the very object which he is seeking, considered as a supreme object, is unholy; the means by which he endeavors to gain it, are also unholy; and under such an influence, how can he form any other than an unholy character? It were a contradiction to suppose that a person should make the favor of the world his governing object, and not retain that carnal mind which is enmity against God.

He, on the other hand, who seeks supremely the approbation of God, endeavors to be conformed to a standard of perfect holiness. He can gain the divine approbation only by yielding obedience to the law which God has given him as the rule of his conduct; and that law is perfectly holy. In endeavoring to obey its requisitions, he comes under a sanctifying influence; he is brought immediately into the atmosphere of moral purity. And the more earnestly he seeks the divine ap-

probation, by seeking conformity to the divine law, the more his character becomes assimilated to that of the infinitely holy God.

II. Such is the influence which the two principles brought to view in our text, exert upon human character. I am now, secondly, to illustrate the influence of the same principles on HUMAN HAPPINESS. And if the effect on character be as has been represented, it would seem that little need be said to illustrate the effect on happiness; for it admits of no question, on the one hand, that a stable, courageous, honest, consistent, and holy character, is favorable to happiness; nor, on the other, that a fickle, timid, hypocritical, inconsistent, and unholy character, has within itself the elements of misery. But as this is a point of great importance, I shall illustrate it by several distinct particulars.

1. *The person who seeks supremely the favor of the world, has no assurance that he shall gain it: he who seeks supremely the favor of God, has certain evidence that his efforts will be successful.*

In order to estimate the difficulty of gaining the favor of the world, consider, for a moment, how difficult it often is to gain the favor of an individual. Not unfrequently, the efforts to accomplish this object fail from the want of a proper knowledge of the disposition to be consulted; or from their being made at an unpropitious moment; or from suspicion being excited that they have originated in some selfish purpose. Hence it has often happened that the very means which have been used to secure favor, have resulted in producing displeasure or disgust. And if it is often so difficult to gain the favor even of an individual, how much greater the task to gain that of many; and how much greater still, that of the world; or of that part of it with which we have intercourse. As the number of individuals, and of course

the variety of dispositions which we have to consult in our conduct, increases, the greater the probability that interfering claims will be made upon us which we shall not be able to meet, and that in gaining the favor of some, we shall provoke the jealousy of others. Thus, you perceive that, if you make the approbation of the world your supreme object, you can never be certain of gaining it; at least in any considerable degree. Admitting that it were ever so valuable, when attained, you may, for aught you can tell, spend your days in seeking it, and die without having ever gained your object.

But he who seeks supremely the favor of God, has an assurance that his efforts shall not be in vain. This assurance results from the declarations of God, and from the experience of men. Jehovah, speaking under the name of Wisdom, says, "I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me." And again, our Saviour says, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." And the testimony of experience corresponds with the declarations of God. Every person who has made the favor of God his supreme object, has attained it; and in far the greater number of instances, the evidence of having attained it has been communicated in the light of God's countenance, and in the spirit of adoption. Every such instance conveys an assurance that the favor of God may be gained, by all who will seek it in a proper manner.

Here, then, you perceive one important point of difference between the two objects brought to view in our text;—the difference between a certainty and an uncertainty. Even if the favor of God and the favor of the world, when actually gained, were equally valuable, as means of promoting happiness, yet you have no security that you can gain the one, while you have certain evidence that you may gain the other. Who that is

wise, would choose to spend his strength in pursuit of that which would probably elude his grasp, while his efforts might be directed towards another object, to say the least, of equal value, which was fairly within his reach ?

2. *He who seeks supremely the favor of the world, if he gains it, has no security that he shall retain it : he who seeks supremely the favor of God, having once gained it, has an assurance that he shall retain it for ever.*

Who does not know, who has not felt, how unstable are human friendships ? Who of us has not witnessed cases in which the most ardent friendships—friendships which seemed formed for life, have suddenly given place to deep-rooted and bitter enmity ; and that too, it may be, from some circumstance of the most trifling nature ? Who of us has not, at some time, been met with distant reserve, where he anticipated a cordial welcome ; or who has not been pained to observe indications of diminished regard, when he has been conscious of having done nothing to deserve it, and has been unable even to conjecture the occasion of the change ? Nor are these facts difficult to be accounted for. There is a fickleness belonging to the human character, which goes far towards explaining it. Moreover, as you are yourself, but an imperfect and sinful being, you are liable, from the impulse of passion or the want of proper caution, to say and do some things which may wound the feelings of a friend, and ultimately produce a permanent alienation : or you may say and do other things, with perfectly innocent intentions, which, yet, from being misunderstood, may produce the same unhappy effect : or some jealous rival, who wishes to supplant you in the affections of your friend, may, by his disingenuous efforts, accomplish the object. You perceive, then, that if the favor of the world were worth ever so much in itself, and were gained with ever so much ease, its value would

be greatly abated by the consideration that you have no security that you shall retain it even for an hour. Must not the very enjoyment of it be embittered by the uncertainty of its continuance; and what will you do, when it is actually gone, and has left you without any other resources?

Far otherwise is it with the favor of God. Gain that once, and you have gained it for eternity. The love which God bears for his people, is called, in scripture, an "everlasting love." Our Saviour declares concerning them, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." I do not mean that the christian may not, by neglect of duty, lose, in some measure, the evidences of the divine favor, and provoke God to a temporary withdrawment of the light of his countenance. But I mean that he who is once reconciled to God, has his name written in the lamb's book of life; and that name will never be blotted out: and even the temporary loss of divine consolation, he may and will, in a great measure at least, avoid, if he is faithful in the discharge of duty. Yes, I repeat, the favor of God, once gained, endureth forever. Principalities and powers may combine their efforts to wrest from the believer this possession, but it will still remain his. It is secured by the promise—the oath, of the ever-living Jehovah.

3. *He who seeks supremely the favor of the world, even if he not only gains it, but retains it till the close of life, does not, after all, find in it what he needs: he who seeks supremely the favor of God, finds in it every thing that he needs.*

Be it so, that so long as the days of prosperity last, the man who seeks supremely the favor of the world, finds in it a portion with which he is tolerably satisfied;—though I doubt not that even then, the heart sometimes sickens over the meagreness of its enjoyments, and longs for

something more substantial and satisfying: but let it not be forgotten, that in the calendar of human life are numbered many days of affliction. There are days of pain, when the hand of disease rests upon us, with convulsive and ominous pressure. There are days of bereavement, when the light of friendship and hope goes out in our dwellings. Above all, there is the day of death, when this earthly tabernacle tumbles to ruins, and the spirit which has inhabited it takes its flight to other worlds. Weigh all the consolation to be derived from the favor of the world in either of these cases, and it will be lighter than vanity. Can the favor of the world make you forget the pains which convulse your system? Can the favor of the world cheer your desolate heart, when your dearest friend goes down to the grave? Will any light break from the favor of the world upon the valley of death, to cheer your passage from time into eternity? On yonder dying bed lies a man, the grand object of whose life has been to gain the favor of the world: and now in this extremity of nature—this most fearful exigency of his existence, let the world be called upon to open its resources of consolation. Who now of all the children of the world shall go to that bed of death in the character of a comforter? Shall the votary of wealth go, and talk to that dying sinner of his splendid domains or numerous possessions? Shall the votary of pleasure go, and tell of some projected scene of amusement, where every heart will beat high with sensual joy? Shall the stout-hearted and impious opposer of religion go, and talk fearlessly about dying, and exhibit all the black infidelity of his creed, and press the awful thought of annihilation? Who will not say that all this is but an insult to the agonies of death; and that they who have professedly come on an errand of consolation, have only imparted an additional sharpness to the pang of dying? Go back, ye miserable comforters; this is not the place for you. Here are agonies to be relieved, which your presence only serves

to heighten. This expiring sinner pants for something which it is not for you, or the world which you represent, to bestow; and because he has it not, he is stung by remorse, or overwhelmed with despair.

Such are the world's resources of consolation in respect to the calamities which befal us while we remain in it: And if it is so powerless to yield relief even here, what can it do for the soul when it shall have passed into the eternal world? Think not that all the evils to which men are exposed, exist in the present life: the most fearful evils belong to the condition of the sinner in eternity. But when he has once passed the boundary of time, the world, if it had ever so many favors to bestow, can no longer reach him. The influence of what it *has* done is indeed felt, not in the mitigation, but in the aggravation of his doom; but henceforth it can do nothing either to lessen or to increase his anguish. Oh, if the favor of the world could satisfy every desire in the present life, yet how poor a portion would it be, so long as it offers no provision for a future and eternal existence!

Not so with the all-sufficient God. When the arrows of affliction pierce the heart, Jehovah condescends to take up his residence in it, while it is yet bleeding and broken, as the Spirit of consolation. You may see what his Almighty grace can do, in that quiet and uncomplaining spirit which delights to count up the mercies of God, on the bed of pain. You may see it in the cheerful submission with which the heart lets go the earthly objects and interests which it valued most; in the serenity which settles upon the countenance, while the falling clods announce that a beloved friend will never rise from his dark bed till the morning of the resurrection. You may see it especially in the sublime actings of that faith, which often enables the soul to hold sweet communion with its Redeemer in the valley of death, and to celebrate, as it were, the fall of the earthly tabernacle with a shout of victory. And beyond the boundaries of time, when the

soul wakes, conscious, active, immortal, and the world has no more that it can do, or even attempt to do, for the soul's comfort, there will flow out to it from the favor of God, blessings large as its desires—lasting as its existence. Tell me, ye votaries of the world's favor, what is it, when compared with the treasures of Almighty grace?

4. *He who seeks supremely the favor of the world, forfeits the peace of his conscience: he who seeks supremely the favor of God, secures the peace of his conscience.*

As there is an essential difference between virtue and vice, holiness and sin, so God has constituted us with the power of perceiving this difference; and with the perception, has connected a corresponding feeling of approbation or disapprobation; and in respect to our own conduct, of pleasure or pain. Now, that that course of conduct in which we seek supremely the favor of the world is a sinful course, admits of no question; for surely it is the very essence of sin to withhold the heart from God. He who adopts such a course, then, must necessarily fall under the lash of his own conscience. He may indeed, for the most part, succeed in drowning her accusations in the din of pleasure or the din of business; but sometimes, at least, she will speak with an authority and an energy that will make him tremble; and with such an accuser as this in his bosom, it matters little how many friends he may have in the world. Moreover, conscience sternly points him to a retribution: she spreads out before him his sins, as matter of record in the book of God's remembrance, and as matter for trial on the judgment day: she anticipates the condemning sentence, and the final doom; and asks with awful emphasis, "Who can dwell with everlasting burnings?" The martyr on the rack, or in the flames, may be happy; for he has conscience on his side: but not he who is at war with himself, though he may dwell in a palace, or sit upon a throne.

He, on the other hand, who seeks supremely the favor of God, keeps a conscience, in a good degree, void of offence. The course of conduct which he must pursue in order to gain the divine approbation, is precisely that which conscience approves and prescribes. Hence, let his external circumstances be as they may, he has peace within—a peace that passeth understanding. And not only has he the delightful consciousness of doing right, but he can look upward to the throne of God, and recognize in the august Being who sits thereon, a forgiving Father: he can look forward to the eternal world, and in the bright glories of Heaven, can recognize his own future and everlasting portion. Say, ye who have known what it is to have a conscience burdened with guilt, and have afterwards known what it is to have that burden removed by the application of the peace-speaking blood of Christ; —say whether a good conscience—a pacified conscience, is not among the richest blessings to be enjoyed on this side heaven?

5. I observe in the last place, that *he who seeks supremely the favor of God, is more likely to gain the favor of the world, than he who makes the favor of the world his chief object.*

It is a truth never to be forgotten, that men are constituted with an original sense of right and wrong; and that nothing but an extreme degree of depravity can materially impair it. Hence it is not at the option of men whether they will respect virtue or not: they may indeed profess to despise it, and make it the theme of ridicule and insult; but they cannot, unless by a long course of flagrant wickedness, extinguish that sentiment of reverence for it, which belongs to their nature. Does not the world respect stability, honesty, consistency, of character? I hesitate not to make the appeal to the most fickle, dishonest, and inconsistent of the children of the world; and whatever may be the testimony of their lips, I doubt not

that their consciences will return an affirmative answer. In the exhibition of these traits of character, no doubt, there will be some things to which their feelings will be opposed; but nothing which will not accord with their conviction of what is right, reasonable, and honorable.

Moreover, in making the favor of God your supreme object, you necessarily adopt a course of conduct from which the world cannot fail to derive much advantage. You not only cautiously avoid doing them injury, but you aim, by every means in your power, to promote their best interests. Now I maintain that, as depraved as man is, he has too much of conscience, and I may say ordinarily too much of gratitude, to be able altogether to resist such an appeal. Show a man that you are his friend, by doing every thing you can for his benefit, and let this course be continued for a long time, and it must be a deeply rooted prejudice indeed, which will not yield to such an exhibition of kindness. "And who is he that will harm you," says the apostle, "if ye be followers of that which is good?"

But what appears so probable from the nature of the case, is abundantly confirmed by facts. Look abroad and decide for yourselves, who is the person to whom the world renders the most substantial tribute of respect. Is it not the man who is stable in all his purposes, and who has moral courage to carry them into effect; who is honest in all his dealings, both before God and man; whose conduct is consistent with itself, and consistent with his profession; and who maintains a close and holy walk with God? I dare appeal to any of you, my young friends, for an answer. Is it not manifest, then, both from reason and from fact, that they who seek supremely the favor of the world, mistake in respect to the best means of gaining it; and that it is the ordinance of God that it should be found of those, of whom it may be said comparatively that they seek it not?

And now, my young friends, will not every one of you resolve, here on the threshold of life, that you will make the favor of God, and not the favor of the world, your grand object of pursuit? Is it not evident that the world is a hard master; that while its favor is difficult to be gained, it is easy to be lost; that all that it can do for its votaries, it does in seasons of prosperity, when they are least in need; and that when the evil days come, it leaves them to struggle unassisted with calamity and death? Is it not manifest, on the other hand, that it is a most profitable employment to seek the favor of God: for his favor is not only easily gained, and when gained, is never lost, but it is life; it meets all the exigencies of the soul in every period of its existence. Moreover it keeps the soul at peace with itself; and saves it from the shudderings of guilt, and the forebodings of hell. And even the world itself renders its best tribute to the man who seeks supremely the favor of God. Be it your fixed purpose, then, in every step that you take, to endeavor to gain the divine approbation. In all the various parts of your deportment, in all your intercourse with the world, especially in the adoption of your religious sentiments, and the formation of your religious character, let the grand inquiry be, 'What will please God who searcheth the heart?' Do this, and no matter whether the world smile, or whether the world frown; for you can look inward to an approving conscience, and upward to an approving God.

LECTURE VI.

RELIGION AN ALL-PERVADING PRINCIPLE.

MATTHEW XIII. 8.

BUT OTHER FELL INTO GOOD GROUND, AND BROUGHT FORTH FRUIT.

One of the most fruitful sources of self-deception, especially among the young and inexperienced, is the disposition which prevails to take partial views of religion. There are those who make the whole of religion consist in a correct creed ; and expect to be saved by their faith, though it neither purifies the heart, nor controls the life. There are those whose religion is made up entirely of strong emotion ; who make the evidence of christian character turn solely upon the point of powerful excitement ; regarding it as only a secondary concern, what they believe on the one hand, or how they live on the other. And there are others still, with whom the morality of the life is all in all ; who, while they refrain from open vice, and are honest in their dealings, and punctual to their engagements, and perhaps charitable to the poor, pronounce an attachment to the truths of the bible, bigotry ; and the inward experience of the power of these truths, enthusiasm. Each of these classes has, at best, but a partial religion. They are all chargeable with separating things which God hath joined together ; and they despoil christianity not only of its beauty, but of its power.

The parable from which our text is taken, is designed to illustrate the different influence which the gospel exerts upon different hearts, according to their preparation for receiving it. The text itself illustrates the influence of the gospel on a heart that has been mellowed and prepared for its reception by divine grace. By the seed, we are to understand the word of God. By the good ground, an honest heart. By its bringing forth fruit, its substantial and visible effect in a course of external obedience. The plain import of the passage then is, that the word of God being cordially believed, or received through the understanding into a good heart, becomes the principle of a holy life; in other words, that RELIGION IS AN ALL-PERVADING PRINCIPLE.

In illustrating this sentiment, I observe,

I. First, that *Religion demands the homage of the intellect, and requires that the truth should be believed.*

I am not about to plead the cause of those who will have it that perfect agreement in religious opinion is necessary to constitute the basis of mutual charity; or that absolute freedom from theological error is essential to our acceptance with God: for if the former of these were true, the christian brotherhood would either be completely dissolved, or would be reduced almost to nothing: if we were to admit the latter, it might well be asked, 'Who then can be saved?' Nor is it any part of my design to agitate the delicate and difficult question, 'What degree of religious error may be held in consistency with a claim to christian character?' For he that reflects at all must perceive that no general answer to this inquiry can be given; for as men are to be judged according to the light which they enjoy, the same degree of error may be incomparably more dangerous in some circumstances than in others. Without inquiring, therefore, what the leading truths of the gospel are, I am only concerned, at present, to show, that whatever they are, they are to be believed;

and that he who refuses his assent to them, cannot, in any proper sense of the word, be considered a christian.

For in the first place, I may ask, if it is not important that the truths of the gospel should be believed, *wherefore did God reveal them?* If you admit that God is a Being of infinite wisdom, you must also admit that his views of things are all perfectly right; and that whatever He regards important, certainly is so. What, then, I ask, shall we infer from the fact of his having made a revelation, except that He judged it important that such a revelation should be made? And if this be a legitimate inference even from the *fact*, is it not still more so from the *circumstances* of the fact; from the wonderful expense at which this revelation was given to the world, and the wonderful interest which has been manifested for its preservation? Would Jehovah, think you, have raised up a succession of men, reaching through a period of many centuries, and anointed them with his own Spirit, that they might communicate his will without the possibility of error; and would he have miraculously interposed by his providence, to preserve this inspired record amidst revolutions in which every human record has perished, if, after all, he regarded it as a matter of inconsiderable moment? Has he not, then, by his providence, inscribed upon it his own estimate of its value?

But if Jehovah regards this revelation important, whence does it derive its importance in his estimation? Doubtless from the fact that it is designed to be instrumental of promoting his glory in the salvation of men. But how can it subserve this object, unless you believe it, any more than a system of pagan philosophy, which you have never taken the trouble to examine, or if you have, have thrown it by as bearing the stamp of absurdity or imposture? In refusing your assent to the truths of the Bible, then, you set up your wisdom against that of the Eternal; you virtually declare that the communication of his will made at an unparalleled expense, does not

deserve your regard: you close against it even the doors of your understanding; and what greater affront than this can you offer to the Almighty Being who dictated it?

But you say, perhaps, that *you* believe the Bible, and therefore these remarks are inapplicable to you. I answer, they are not inapplicable, provided you hold the maxim that it is no matter what a man believes in respect to its leading truths; for if it is no matter what he believes, it is no matter whether he believes any thing. Talk not of your belief either in the authority or the doctrines of revelation, so long as you maintain that a rejection of either is innocent; for reason herself is at no loss to answer the question whether that faith is of any value which pronounces it innocent to contemn the authority of God, and slight his acknowledged communications.

Let no one here, professing to admit the claims of the Bible to be a divine revelation, repeat the hackneyed allegation against it, that its meaning is obscure; and that where there is so much room for difference of opinion, it were rash to fix a limit to our charity. In respect to minor points of christian doctrine, let the principle, if you will, be admitted; but the moment you extend its application to the leading truths of the gospel, you virtually arraign Jehovah on the charge of trifling with his creatures. You bring against him the accusation of having professedly given a revelation to mankind—a revelation too which involves their destiny for eternity—and yet of having framed it in such a manner that it actually amounts to no revelation; because its meaning is incapable of being satisfactorily ascertained. Nor can you escape from this fearful reflection upon the Divine character, by saying that this effect is chargeable to the limited powers of the human mind; because the author of it knew well the character of the beings for whom it was designed, and the same Being who made the mind, made the revelation; and to say that he did not adapt the one to the other, would be

nothing less than to charge him with a deficiency either of wisdom or goodness. I repeat, then, he who makes the obscurity of the Bible an apology for error in respect to any of its prominent doctrines, puts himself in the impious attitude of God's accuser: he lifts his arm toward the eternal throne, and insolently asks, "Why doest thou so?"

Another consideration which shows that a belief of the truth is an essential part of religion, is, that *all good practice must have its foundation in good principles.* I know indeed there may be that which to the eye of man shall appear to be good practice—there may be an external morality so correct as to defy the most rigid human scrutiny, and yet it may all be the operation of the merest selfishness—the homage which a heart in rebellion against God renders to the good opinion of the world. But when we speak of good practice in connexion with religion, we can mean nothing less by it than that which is good in the sight of God; and as He searches the heart, surely no external actions *can* be good in his sight, except those which are prompted by good motives—which are built upon good principles. Men adopt the same rule, so far as they can, in judging of each other; that is, they estimate the character of actions by the supposed motives in which they originate; though from the imperfection of their views, they are always liable to be deceived. But Jehovah can never call evil good, or good evil; for every motive and principle of human conduct is perfectly open to his inspection.

Now, what think you, in the view of God, must constitute the principles of action which he can approve? What, but the truths which he has revealed in his word? Are not the motives which they contain for pursuing the course of action which is here pointed out, not only the most rational, but the most weighty, which it is possible for the human mind to contemplate? But these truths can never become with you the principles of action, un-

less they are believed; so that in the rejection or the neglect of them, you actually undermine the foundation of a good life, and render your claims to religious character as baseless as the fabric of a vision.

Separate now from religion a belief in the great truths of the bible, and see whether, in this new form, she does not seem to you maimed, and stripped of her glory. What is the religion of the heart, if the heart be not under the influence of divine truth? If it be any thing that has the semblance of religion, it is mere animal excitement. It is the fever of the soul—the fire of the passions, now breaking out furiously and now dying away: it is a gust of enthusiasm, which perhaps passes over in an hour, but is yet desolating as a whirlwind. It has in it nothing of uniformity or consistency; it yields no solid comfort; it prompts to no useful actions. It is, if I may be allowed the expression, a religion of accident; it rises and falls, it burns and expires, none can predict when, and none can imagine why. And if such be the religion of the heart, where there is any experimental religion professed, apart from the operation of christian principle, what will you say of the religion of the life? There may indeed be an occasional paroxysm of blind zeal; but in general you may expect to find a deplorable neglect of duty, as unlike the christian life as the most opposite elements are different from each other. But suppose it be otherwise, and the life be most scrupulously correct, and every external duty be performed with pharisaical exactness, what is it, after all, but the body without the spirit; a professed recognition of your obligations to obey God, while yet, at the same time, you actually refuse to obey him; for this you do, let your external deportment be what it may, so long as you act from any other principles than those which he has prescribed for the regulation of your conduct. Suppose that a fellow-creature were to render you the most essential service, and to act towards you the part of the

greatest benefactor ; but that you should afterwards know that in all his apparent efforts for your benefit, he had actually had no regard for you, but was aiming only at the accomplishment of some selfish purpose? Would not such a discovery materially change your opinion of his character, and annihilate every sentiment of obligation towards him? Estimate, then, on the same principle, the character of that external obedience which is rendered to God, and which is sadly misnamed a good life, when it results not from a belief of God's truth, or from a regard to his authority, but from the operation of that spirit of selfishness which is but another name for rebellion.

I appeal, finally, to *the Bible itself*, for direct proof that a belief of its doctrines enters essentially into the nature of religion. The apostle, in writing to the Hebrews, declares, that "without faith it is impossible to please God." John the Baptist, whose ministry was designed as a preparation for the establishment of Christ's kingdom, exhorted those whom he addressed, to "believe the gospel." Our Saviour himself has declared, "He that believeth—shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." And again, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life; and he shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." If a belief of the truths of the gospel, then, be so important that God has thought proper to make it the subject of an express command; if he has declared that it is essential to obtaining his favor, and has suspended upon it the possession of everlasting life, who will doubt that it enters essentially into the nature of true religion?

But you will say that the faith which the passages to which I have referred, contemplate, is something more than a mere intellectual belief; that it includes the exercise of the affections. Be it so; but it involves the as-

sent of the understanding also, and cannot exist without it: for to suppose that any truth could influence the heart, from which the understanding witheld its assent, were an absurdity. We are warranted, therefore, in applying to the faith of the intellect the passages which have been quoted, so far as to say, that without this faith (I here speak of those who enjoy the gospel) it is impossible to obtain the divine favor, or to secure eternal life. More than this is indeed necessary; but without this, nothing else can be of any avail.

Thus I have endeavored to show you that a belief of God's truth, an intellectual assent to the doctrines of the bible, is an essential part of religion;—so essential that the maxim that it is no matter what a man believes, is perfectly at war with the genius of the gospel, and utterly unworthy the character of a christian. But,

II. *Religion demands the homage of the heart, and requires that the truth should be felt.* Though it begins with the understanding, it does not end there: the understanding is only the door through which it makes its way to the heart.

In illustration of this sentiment, I observe that *all the great truths of revelation are directly calculated to call into exercise the affections.* Is man susceptible of fear? If by fear be meant a holy reverence, what better fitted to awaken this sentiment than the scriptural character of God? Or if we understand by it a dread of evil, what better calculated to excite it, than the fearful outline which the bible has given us of the condition of the lost? Is man susceptible of gratitude? Where is to be found the record of so much condescension and love, of so much suffering voluntarily endured, and endured for enemies, as is exhibited in the word of God? Is man a creature of sorrow and of joy? What better calculated to melt him into sorrow, than a contemplation of the evil of sin, and of his own sins in particular, especially when

viewed in their connexion with the cross of Christ? And what can waken in his breast a thrill of joy, if it be not a view of the glories of the divine character, and the glories of redemption, and the glories of immortality, as they are brought to view in the word of God? Is man susceptible of hope? What object in the universe ought to be an object of desire, if it be not the incorruptible inheritance which is reserved in heaven for the faithful; and what more could be done to place it within his reach, and to make it a proper object of expectation and of effort, than the word of God assures us has actually been done? In short, I will venture to say, that there is not an emotion of the soul, which it is right to indulge, which the truth of God, in some or other of its parts, is not fitted to awaken. Surely, then, the author of our religion must have designed that it should be a religion for the affections, else its truths would not have been so adapted to call them into exercise.

Again: *Religion is designed to promote our happiness; but it can do this only as it influences the affections; for happiness has its seat in the affections.* No exercise of the understanding can yield any enjoyment, apart from the influence which it exerts upon the feelings. It is possible that a mathematician may be enraptured in the contemplation of lines and angles; but the enjoyment consists not in the abstract contemplation, but in the feeling of admiration and interest which is awakened by it. There is enjoyment in the operation of many of the affections of the soul—in hope, in love, in gratitude, in submission, yes, and even in godly sorrow; but there is no enjoyment in the bare operation of the intellect, because the intellect is not the seat of enjoyment. If then religion will answer the great purpose which it proposes, that of making man happy, it must address itself to him as a creature of feeling; and it must bring before him considerations which are fitted powerfully to affect his feelings; and any religion which should not do this,

would mistake the character of man, and would be altogether inadequate to the exigencies for which it was intended to provide. As we here assume the fact that our religion is of divine origin, and that it is intended to make men happy, and as all experience proves that happiness has its seat in the affections, we are brought instantly to the conclusion that it claims the homage of the heart, not less than of the understanding; and that he whose religion terminates in the intellect, has not a religion to render him happy.

Moreover, let *the word of God* be brought to testify to this point, and you will find that its testimony is equally decisive and abundant. I have already alluded to the fact that the faith which the gospel makes a condition of salvation, is not merely the faith of the understanding, but of the affections. Accordingly, when the eunuch inquired of Philip in regard to the propriety of his being baptized, the reply was, 'If thou believest *with all thine heart*, thou mayest.' Is the exercise of repentance also a condition of salvation? But who does not know that repentance is chiefly a work for the affections? Does the word of God require that we should "rejoice in the Lord alway;" that we should be "patient in tribulation;" that we should be "meek and lowly in heart;" that we should "love one another with a pure heart, fervently;" that we should "be spiritually minded, which is life and peace?" In making these requisitions, do you not perceive that it has identified the very existence of religion with the exercise of the affections? And what testimony shall be regarded as decisive, if this be pronounced insufficient?

Is it not manifest, then, that let your religion embrace as much truth as it will, and as much external morality as it may, it can never be the religion which God requires, or which your own eternal interests demand, unless it reaches the heart! I proceed to a

III. Third, and the only remaining consideration to which I shall call your attention, which is, that *religion demands the homage of the life, and requires that the truth should be obeyed.* And on this article, a few hints, surely, may suffice; for however men may deny the importance of a correct creed, or of experimental piety, there are none but the grossly abandoned, who would dare to deny that it is essential to religion, to live what is commonly called a good life.

If I have succeeded in the preceding part of the discourse, in showing that correct faith and correct feeling are essential parts of religion, you will perceive that the proposition which has just been announced, is only an inference from what has already been proved; *for a good life is just as certain to result from good principles and good affections, as a stream is sure to proceed from a fountain.* Correct principles alone do not indeed insure correct conduct; for every day's experience shows that men whose moral and religious opinions are the most unexceptionable, flagrantly violate their own convictions, and rush into the haunts of iniquity. But where correct opinions are suffered to have their legitimate influence on the affections, where faith in the truths of religion purifies the heart, there you may look for a holy life with as much confidence as you can calculate on any effect from its known cause. And let me say that all external reformation which is not produced in this way, is of little value. If it be the effect of correct principles united with correct feelings, if it be the fruit of the good seed sown in good ground, you may expect not only that it will be lasting, but that it will become more and more complete. But if it be brought about in any other way, let it be apparently ever so promising, you cannot depend upon its continuance; for it has no root in itself; and while it does continue, it is, to the Searcher of hearts, only a fair covering thrown over a principle of hostility and rebellion.

Moreover, *it is the genius of the gospel, that it is in the highest degree practical;* for while a cordial belief of its truths forms in man the spirit of obedience, it minutely prescribes for him a course of external duty, and leaves him at no loss in respect to what he ought to do in any of the relations of life. Be your rank high or low, be the measure of your responsibility comparatively great or small, be your circumstances in life what they may, open the bible, and here the path of duty is so plainly marked out, that you can have no apology for mistaking it. It is marked out too by a divine hand, and comes to you under the sanction of divine authority.

Thus I have endeavored to show you that religion takes cognizance of the whole man; that it claims the homage of the intellect, the homage of the heart, the homage of the life.

I have discussed this subject, my young friends, the rather, as it seems to me that *there are some features in the religious character of the present age, from which you are peculiarly exposed to the adoption of a partial religion.* The present is an age of *controversy;* a period in which there are a thousand conflicting opinions in respect to religious truth; and there is great reason to fear that, instead of referring these opinions to the law and the testimony, to ascertain what is right, you will hastily conclude from the contradictions and absurdities which many of them involve, that none of them can be very important, and that there can be no great hazard in remaining unsettled upon a subject which admits of such variety of speculation. Or else, on the other hand, there is danger that, in the heat of controversy, you will attach so much importance to your own opinions, as to make you feel that religion is a matter of opinion and nothing else; and that the correctness of your creed may atone for the obliquities of your heart or life. The present also is an age of *revivals*, when the operations of

the Spirit of God in awakening and converting sinners seem to be more powerful and rapid than in ages that have gone by; and there is so much said, and properly said too, of the state of the feelings in connexion with the evidence of christian character, that you are in danger of taking up the delusion that religion is only a set of emotions, and that the great end of religion is accomplished in mere animal excitement. Moreover, the present is an age of *action;* there is a stirring almost throughout the church of God, in behalf of the interests of Christ's kingdom, such as has never been witnessed before; and there is something so noble in the project of extending the gospel through the world, that millions of hearts are beating high for its accomplishment. But may there not be danger, while you are putting forth your hand to this high and holy enterprise, that you will come to imagine that what you are doing for others, is an apology for what you are neglecting to do for yourself; and that while your hands are so busy in the cause of man's salvation, you may be safe in neglecting to ascertain the holy truths of the gospel, and in neglecting to yield your hearts to their influence? I advert to these dangers, that you may think of them, if you have not; and that you may think more of them, if you have; for if I mistake not, neither their reality, nor their magnitude, admits of question. I counsel you, that you may effectually avoid them, to become established in the truth; but remember that, if this is all that your religion does for you, it will leave you to perish. Advance farther, then, and let the truth have its legitimate effect upon your heart; in melting you into penitence, in renovating your affections, in imparting to you the spirit of adoption—the confidence, the submission, the humility, of a child of God. And finally, let the holy principles and feelings which you have drawn from the word of God, be acted out in the life; in whatsoever things are

pure, and lovely, and honest, and of good report. Such a character as this would attract the homage of the world, the admiration of angels, the benediction of God. It would be the pledge of the highest happiness to be enjoyed on earth, and of an exceeding and eternal weight of glory in heaven.

LECTURE VII.

PERSUASIVE TO RELIGION.

LUKE XIV. 17.

COME, FOR ALL THINGS ARE NOW READY.

The parable of which these words are a part, was intended primarily to illustrate the sovereign grace of God in causing the gospel to be first preached to the Jews, their contemptuous rejection of it, and its being subsequently offered to the Gentiles. It is susceptible, however, of a much more extensive application; as containing a faithful description of the gracious conduct of God towards all to whom the gospel comes, on the one hand, and of the reception which it too often meets in every age, on the other.

The gospel is here represented under the similitude of a feast; and it is the business of Christ's ministers, as it was the business of the servants in the parable, to go abroad and publish the invitation. It is the design of this discourse to bring home this invitation to the hearts of the young; to endeavor to attract them by an exhibition of the grace of the gospel, to a compliance with its requisitions. Let every youth, then, who listens to this discourse, consider himself affectionately addressed in the language of the text—"Come, for all things are now ready."

The text obviously suggests two topics:

THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE GOSPEL FEAST:

THE INVITATION TO THE GOSPEL FEAST.

Let us attend to them in their order.

I. The SUFFICIENCY of the gospel feast:—"All things are now ready."

This branch of the discourse may be illustrated by showing that *the gospel makes provision for all the moral wants of man.*

Particularly,

It contemplates him as *ignorant*, and provides for his *instruction*. There are many truths connected with religion, which God may be said to have inscribed on the works of his hands;—truths which relate especially to his own existence, character, and government; and these, no doubt, it is within the province of a well-directed reason to trace in the contemplation of his works; but experience proves that even these truths, reflected as they are from every part of the creation, can yet be completely overlooked through the blinding influence of human depravity. There are other truths, however, of vital importance to man, upon which the book of nature is entirely silent, and at which it were impossible for man to arrive in the most faithful use of his unassisted powers: these God has been pleased to make the subject of a written revelation; and that revelation we have in the gospel. In estimating the importance of the gospel as a fountain of knowledge, observe how great the advantage which it has over every other. Its truths are the most sublime that ever occupied, or ever can occupy, the mind of man; and the contemplation of them is fitted to exalt all his intellectual and moral faculties. They are also intimately blended with his own highest interests, both as it respects this world and the world to come; insomuch that God himself has declared that "he that believeth" them "shall be saved, and he that believeth" them "not, shall be damned." And

moreover, they come to us upon the authority of God ; so that, in receiving them, we have the highest possible evidence that we are not embracing a system of error. Say now, whither shall man repair for instruction, but to the gospel? Where else can he find truth so sublime, so important, so unmixed, as here? Let him read whatever has been written by the wise men of the world, whether in ancient or modern times ; and after having wearied himself with the endless absurdities and contradictions into which they have fallen on the most momentous of all subjects, let him return to the gospel, and draw living water out of these wells of salvation. Here he will find every thing simple, perspicuous, sublime ;—a field in which the noblest intellect may expatiate forever, and be continually advancing in its discoveries from glory to glory.

Again: The gospel contemplates man as *guilty*, and provides for his *forgiveness*. I know that it is possible for the voice of conscience to be drowned, in a great degree, amidst the strife and tumult of the world ; and I doubt not that there is a point in depravity beyond which conscience becomes powerless in this life, even to warn the sinner of his approaching doom: but I know too that this principle of conscience makes part of every man's moral constitution ; and that it intimates to every one more or less distinctly, and more or less frequently, the fact that an eternal retribution awaits him ; and that, in consequence of being a sinner, he is exposed to the displeasure of God. Does he ask reason whether it is possible that sin can be forgiven ; and if so, through what channel forgiveness can be communicated? Ah, he has consulted reason on a point upon which she has nothing to say: and if she speaks, it is only to display her ignorance, or to confess it. But let him resort to the gospel, and he will obtain a full solution of the momentous problem: here he will find it written by the finger of inspiration, that God *can* now "be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus ;" that "God so loved the

world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Here is a plan revealed, to the wonder of angels as well as of men, by which Jehovah manifests himself at once the inflexible Judge, and the merciful Father. No matter though his iniquities may have risen mountain-like to the heavens; no matter though he may have been distinguished among the most obdurate transgressors, and may have persevered in his rebellion long after he had seemed ripe for the employments of fiends; yet his case is not so desperate, but that there is an efficacy in the blood of Christ to reach it. Whoever will comply with the requisitions which the gospel proposes, shall hear a voice from the sanctuary of God's grace, saying, "Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee."

Farther: The gospel contemplates man as *polluted*, and provides for his *sanctification*. Not more true is it that man is exposed to the curse of God's law, than that his nature is in ruins: he is laboring under a spiritual malady, which, unless it is arrested and removed, must prove fatal to the soul;—a malady for which the wisdom of the world has long since proved itself inadequate to find out a cure. Here again, what reason could not do, the gospel *has* done. All the truths which it reveals, especially the great doctrine of redemption by the blood of Christ, are fitted to constrain, to exalt, to quicken the affections, and to bring the whole soul under a purifying influence. But this is not all. God is pleased to accompany the gospel with the direct influence of his Spirit; by which especially the rebellion of the heart is subdued, evil affections and desires are eradicated, old things pass away, and all things become new. And it is by this influence that the work of sanctification is not only begun in the soul, but carried forward till it is perfected in glory. Here then is a fountain open for sin and uncleanness;—a complete remedy for the disease of man's moral nature.

I observe, once more, that the gospel contemplates man as subject to *death*, and makes provision for his *immortality*. I do not say that reason is absolutely dumb on the subject of a future existence; but I do say that, after reason has done her utmost to satisfy the anxious inquiries of nature on that subject, she has done comparatively little; and even that little has been rather in the way of vague conjecture, than positive demonstration. I do say that, with all the light that she can shed upon the valley of death, it must be, in every case, a dark valley still; and that he who takes her for his guide, must lay in his account for a hard conflict with doubt and terror, when flesh and heart are failing. Approach the gospel now, and see what relief it has to render to the mind struggling with apprehension in the attempt to look beyond the grave. In the first place, it fully establishes the fact that the spirit lives after the body is dead. Then it goes farther, and opens up the prospect of an exact retribution; describing, so far as the subject falls within the comprehension of man, the miseries of the lost, and the happiness of the saved. And finally, it reveals the fact that the grave shall ere long give up the dead that are in it; and that the righteous dead shall come forth clothed with a body that shall reflect the purity and lustre of the heavens. And what is death to the christian, when contemplated in the view of truths like these? What but a passage—a rough and stormy passage, if you please—from a region of comparative darkness, to a region of perfect light; from a state of trial, and sin, and conflict, to a state of perfect holiness, to the possession of a crown of life! May not the believer look down into the grave with triumph, and even welcome the ravages of the death-worm, if this be only a refining process by which his body is to become fitted to bear an eternal weight of glory? Oh, yes, my young friends, the doctrine of immortality, the doctrine of the resurrection, is, to the christian, like a star of life rising out of the shadows of the tomb. Fixing his eye upon it,

well may he recline upon his Saviour's breast, and breathe his life out sweetly there !

II. I have now endeavored to show you that the gospel makes provision for all the moral wants of man ; thus illustrating the sufficiency of the gospel feast : Let me now, secondly, direct your attention to the INVITATION to the gospel feast—" Come."

As the blessings which are offered in this feast are spiritual blessings, so the act by which they are received is a spiritual act—the act of faith. To *come*, therefore, in the sense of the text, denotes a cordial acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ in all the glories of his person, and in all the benefits of his purchase. But reserving this point for distinct consideration in a future discourse, let me, under this article, direct your attention to two inquiries :

1. *To whom is this invitation addressed ?*

It is addressed to the *skeptical* youth. I am persuaded, my young friend, that if you have given up the gospel, you have not known what you have been doing ; or if you indulge doubts in respect to its divine authority, you do so only because you have not been willing to submit to an examination of its evidence. And though you are afar off, I earnestly call upon you to retrace your steps, and to receive not only with the understanding, but the heart, this gospel which you seem inclined to put away from you. So long as you retain your present ground, if the gospel be true, you cannot doubt that your case is hopeless ; and you surely ought not to presume that it is not true, but upon evidence entirely unexceptionable. Come, then, and see whether it be not true. Come and subject its claims to divinity to as severe a test as you will ; and if you do it with an honest heart, I doubt not that the result will be that you will give all your skepticism to the winds. Come and examine its doctrines, and see whether they are not consistent, sublime, adapted in

every way to the moral wants of man. And while you open your understanding to the light of truth, yield your heart to its purifying influence ; and then all the rich provision which the gospel offers shall become yours. Yes, though you have been so ungrateful as to question its divinity, and to cavil about its truths, you are invited to return and partake of the waters of life as freely as if you had never turned your back upon them.

But this invitation is addressed also to the *profligate* youth. Notwithstanding you are young, you have already ventured into the way of the ungodly, and perhaps have even sat in the seat of the scorner, and possibly may have sunk to a point in profligacy, at which you have become reckless even of the woes of perdition. And if, at any time, the startling thought of a retribution rises in your mind, and you are forced, for a moment, to realize that there is a just God in heaven, and that you have within you an immortal spirit, which, if unrenewed, is destined to fall under his consuming wrath, not improbably you take refuge from your reflections in the imagined hopelessness of your condition ; taking for granted that you must remain where you are, and resolving to make yourself easy as long as possible. I should belie my own convictions if I should say that, in such a case, judging from analogy, there is strong ground of hope for a radical change of character ; but I should certainly be wanting to my duty as a minister of Christ, if I should not proclaim even to such a wanderer from God and Heaven, that " the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin ;" if I should not sound in his ears the gracious invitation, and the gracious encouragement, " Come, for all things are now ready." Stop, profligate youth, and retrace the steps you have taken in the path to death. Exchange the polluted, grovelling pleasures you are pursuing, for the pure and elevated joys of a life of piety. Come and accept the provision which the gospel offers ; and " though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ;" though your

name may have stood first on the list of contemners of God, it shall be transferred to a place in the Lamb's book of life.

To the mere *moral* youth, this invitation is also addressed. In the providence of God, you have been preserved from casting off the restraints of a religious education; and have neither been entangled by the arts of skepticism, nor allured into the haunts of profligacy. You have always maintained a decent respect for divine institutions; and have chosen to be regarded, and actually have been, a well-wisher to the general interests of religion. But farther than this you have never advanced; and for some reason or other, you seem as well satisfied with your present condition, as if you had actually entered in at the straight gate, and had even made your calling and election sure. It may be that you are building a fabric of self-righteousness, which looks beautiful to you, and which you imagine will attract the complacent regards of God. Believe me, you are yielding to delusion; and I call upon you to abandon the delusion, and to come without delay to the fountain of salvation which is opened in the gospel. A life of mere morality may indeed subserve the social interests of man in this life; but it can never confer the consolations of a good hope through grace: it can never cause you to understand the joy of dwelling in the secret place of the Most High: it can never furnish a staff to the soul in its passage through the dark valley: it can never bring in its train an inheritance that is incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. While, therefore, you place a proper estimate upon it, as it stands connected with the interests of the present world, dare not, for a moment, to rest upon it, as a foundation of acceptance with God. Come and exercise a living faith in the great Redeemer; and the morality which is the fruit of that faith, though it can never constitute the ground of your acceptance, may constitute the evidence of it. Come without delay; come now in the

morning of life, else you may soon have formed a confirmed habit of self-righteousness ; and such a habit once formed, is less likely than almost any other to be broken up ; and unless it is broken up, it will as effectually and as certainly destroy you as infidelity or immorality.

The *baptized* youth also has a special interest in this invitation. Your parents, while you were yet incapable of acting for yourselves, dedicated you to God in holy baptism ; and entered into a solemn covenant with him, to train you up for his service and glory. We trust they have redeemed the baptismal pledge, and that by their instructions, and example, and prayers, they have done their utmost to turn your feet into the path to heaven. But know, my young friends, that though you were not active in the solemn transaction in which you were devoted to God, you had a material interest in it, notwithstanding ; and this act of your parents, performed in obedience to God's command, has imposed upon you a weighty obligation, now that you are capable of acting for yourselves, to bring to his service the full vigor of your faculties and affections. Come then, ye children and youth, who, at these altars of God, have received the seal of his gracious covenant ; ye who have been dandled on the knee of piety, and counselled by the lips of fond affection, and instructed in respect to your danger and duty, and in whose behalf a thousand parental prayers have gone up into the ear of mercy—is there nothing in all this to constrain your hearts to accept the gracious invitation of the gospel ? Is there nothing in the thought that you are the children of the church, that you have been born and nurtured in her bosom, and permitted to enjoy so many of her privileges, that comes to you as a rebuke for not having yet received Christ as your Saviour, and publicly recognized your obligations to his love ? Delay no longer to accept the blessings of salvation ; for though there is nothing in the fact of your having been dedicated to God, which can furnish the

shadow of a ground of your acceptance with him, there is that in it which mightily increases your obligation, and which, if you perish, will mightily enhance your condemnation.

The other inquiry to which I proposed to direct your attention under this article, is,

2. *From whom does this invitation come?*

It comes from *the church on earth.* It is the most ardent wish of God's people, and especially of your christian friends, that you should enter without delay on a life of religion. They follow you into the world with an eye of watchful and tender regard; and when you think not of it, they are often sending up prayers for you in secret, that you may be found in the way of God's commandments. When your pious parents see you immersed in worldly vanities, asking no questions with so much interest as "how you shall decorate your persons, or how you shall recommend yourselves most to the gay and worldly," their hearts often sink within them; and especially, if they are about to depart into eternity, and leave you with such dispositions, it adds a bitter pang to the scene of separation; and they wish to cling to life yet a little longer, that they may offer a few more prayers, and use a few more exertions, for the everlasting interests of their children. And not only your parents and other pious friends, but the church among whom your lot is cast, are, as a body, interested for your conversion, and are anxiously waiting to see you come out from an ungodly world, and subscribe with your own hand to the Lord. They tell you that there is room enough within their sacred enclosure for all of you, and for as many as will enter; and they stand ready to greet you with a joyful welcome at the table of communion, and to take you by the hand, as fellow-travellers on the way to heaven. Yes, and others whom you have never seen, even the people of God who dwell in distant lands, and in the islands of the sea—the whole church militant,

may be considered as sending you an invitation, to join their community and partake of their joys.

From *the redeemed in glory*, the same invitation comes to you. They know what it is to have been sinners, and what it is to have been saved; and the benevolence of their glorified nature leads them to regard with intense interest, the salvation of sinners on earth. And is it not reasonable to suppose that this is especially true in respect to those with whom they have here been associated in the endearing relations of life? Every one of the innumerable throng of the redeemed calls upon you to come; but there are those in that blessed assembly, who call with peculiar affection and earnestness, and who plead with you by the remembrance of other days, who would raise the loudest note of thanksgiving on your return to God, and would be the first to greet you on your arrival in heaven. Is there no child in this assembly, who once had a mother who counselled him, and instructed him, and prayed for him, and finally died, leaving him asleep over the interests of his soul? That mother, we doubt not, is, at this moment, a glorified spirit, and is casting her crown at the Redeemer's feet, mingling in the hosannas and hallelujahs of heaven. But think you that she has forgotten her child, because she has reached her destined home? My young friend, whoever you are, that glorified parent remembers you still; and from the third heaven, bids you form and execute the purpose of giving your heart to God; and invites you to prepare to mingle with her in the glories to which she has already been admitted. I am aware that this is a subject on which it becomes us to speak with caution, because we know but little; but I am sure it is comformable to the dictates of reason, and according to the analogy of experience, and certainly not contrary to the spirit of God's word, that the news of such a conversion as I have supposed, would, in some way or other, be conveyed to heaven, and would cause the

grateful exclamation to burst from the lips of that glorified parent, "This my child who was dead, is alive again; who was lost, is found; who seemed ripe for the employments of hell, is destined to sit on one of these thrones of glory for ever and ever."

The *angels of light* echo the same invitation. Our Saviour has taught us explicitly, that there is joy among the angels, when one sinner repenteth: of course, they desire that there may be occasions for this joy. They do not indeed know by experience the misery of being sinners: they have never felt the burden of pollution, the agony of remorse, the fearful apprehension of God's eternal wrath: but still they are not ignorant of the degradation and ruin that sin brings in its train; and they earnestly desire to see the heir of hell changed into the heir of heaven; not only because this change secures to the sinner everlasting life, but because it reflects a new lustre on Christ's mediation, and brings a revenue of glory to God in the highest. They are ministering spirits to the righteous; and they offer themselves, on condition of your repentance, to be ministering spirits to you; to watch over you in danger, to succor you in temptation, to stand by you in death, and to conduct you to glory. Yes, unworthy as you are, ignorant, guilty, polluted as you are, the angels do not regard you as beneath their notice: they bid you arise and come away from these polluted joys, and dress yourself in the robes of the Redeemer's righteousness, that you may be found worthy at last to join their communion.

And above all, JEHOVAH himself sends you this invitation—*the Father*, *the Son*, and *the Holy Ghost*.

Against *the Father of all mercies*, your conduct hitherto has been a course of the most inexcusable rebellion. Nevertheless, he waits to be gracious; and he declares himself ready to forgive all your iniquities, and to sanctify you from all your pollution. He beholds you at a distance, wandering, prodigal children, and in the fulness

of his compassion, bids you return to your Father's house, and opens the store-house of his everlasting bounty, to allure you away from the husks of worldly vanity and pleasure. He declares himself ready, on your return, to adopt you as his children ; to confer upon you the spirit and the privileges of children ; and as a proof of his sincerity, he points you to the cross on which the blessings of redemption were purchased, and solemnly asks, whether he who spared not his own Son, but gave him to die for your sakes, shall not with him also, provided you receive him as your Saviour, freely give you all things ? And is it so, that the great God, from the throne of his glory, condescends to expostulate with you to accept of his salvation ? Who of you will dare to trifle with such amazing condescension, by delaying your acceptance of it for a single hour ?

Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the lost, also invites you. The invitation in the text was originally uttered by him ; and it was left on record for your benefit and acceptance.

It is echoed from the manger in which he was born ; from the scenes of poverty and suffering in which he had not where to lay his head ; from the garden in which he endured his agony ; from the cross on which he yielded up his life ; from the tomb in which his body was laid ; and it is echoed still, amid the intercessions which he presents in behalf of his people before the throne of the eternal Majesty. Yes, my young friends, it is not only the suffering and dying, but the glorified and reigning Saviour, who sends you this invitation : by his bloody baptism on the one hand, and by the glories of his exaltation on the other, he condescends to plead with you to attend to your immortal interests. I bring you the invitation in his name ; and if you turn away from it with cold and scornful indifference, I ask you "what evil hath *He* done," that he should receive such treatment at your hand ; and I ask again, "how" will you "escape, if you neglect so great salvation ?"

From *the Spirit of grace*, also, this invitation comes to you. Open your bible, and wherever you find the invitation recorded, it is the Spirit of God that speaks in it. And it is the same divine agent, communicating the same gracious invitation, in the dispensations of providence, in scenes of affliction, in the operations of conscience, and under the preaching of the word. Recur, for a moment, my young friend, to your past experience. When you stood by the grave of your father, or mother, or some other near friend, and felt your heart throb at the reflection that that friend would slumber on in that dark abode for ages, did not something whisper in your ear a lesson concerning the uncertainty of the world, and the importance of religion? Believe me, in that dispensation, the Spirit was inviting you to become a partaker of heavenly joys. When sickness had withered your energies, and death seemed to stare you in the face, and you thought with horror of the world of retribution, did not the fearful question come up with an interest of which you had never before conceived—"What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" I tell you, there again, the Spirit of God was admonishing you to take off your affections from this shadowy world, and seek superior bliss? When the truth of God has been proclaimed in your hearing with pungency and power, has it not sometimes come home to your heart with strong impression, and made the interests of eternity appear, for a moment, to be all in all? That moment, rely on it, the Holy Spirit was saying unto you, "Come, for all things are now ready." And how has this invitation, conveyed to you through these various channels, been treated? Ah, I appeal to you, whether, when you had put off the weeds of mourning with which the death of your friend had covered you, you did not forget the monitory call to which perhaps you thought you would attend: or whether, when you were raised up from the bed of sickness, you did not leave all your serious impressions

behind you, and come rushing back upon the vanities and gayeties of life: or whether, when you passed out at yonder door, after being affected by some melting exhibition of divine truth, you did not fall into some trifling conversation with some gay companion, and thus put your conscience into as profound a slumber as ever? In either of these cases, my young friend, you turned a deaf ear, you absolutely rejected the Spirit's invitation. I charge you, as you value your immortal soul, never to repeat the fearful experiment.

Behold then, who they are that are interested for your salvation, and are urging you to secure it! The church on earth, and the church in heaven; the angels of light, and God over all blessed for ever; unitedly send you an invitation this day, to come and take the waters of life freely. If you refuse and finally perish, wonder not if you should hereafter hear them unitedly shouting "Hallelujah," as the smoke of your torment ascendeth up for ever and ever!

LECTURE VIII.

EXCUSES FOR THE NEGLECT OF RELIGION.

LUKE XIV. 18.

I PRAY THEE, HAVE ME EXCUSED.

The great principles of human nature, though modified in their operation by circumstances, are substantially the same in all ages. Hence there is a considerable degree of uniformity in the manner in which the gospel is treated, at different periods, and by all classes. When the invitation was sent abroad by the man who had made a feast, instead of being cordially and thankfully accepted, the servants returned, charged with the most flimsy and foolish apologies. When the apostles went forth and preached the gospel to the Jewish nation, here again there were reasons, or rather excuses, offered for not accepting it; and they were even more preposterous than those by which they were represented in the parable. And so too when the servants of the Lord Jesus, at the present day, go forth proclaiming a universal invitation to the gospel feast, and tell sinners of the rich provision made for them, and of the expense at which it has been made, Oh how often are they virtually answered in the language which you have just heard—"I pray thee, have me excused." Lend me your attention then, my young friends, while, from this passage, I endeavor to show you how perfectly futile are the excuses

with which, from time to time, you are putting off the claims of religion. I am aware that most of the excuses which I shall notice are urged by others as well as youth; but while I would commend the subject to the serious consideration of all, I desire that *you* especially would ponder it with earnest attention and self-application.

What then, my young friends, are some of the EXCUSES, by which you are attempting to keep conscience quiet in the neglect of religion?

1. The first which I shall notice is, that *it is impossible, amidst all the conflicting opinions which exist on the subject of religion, to ascertain what religion is;* and hence it is inferred that they are the most prudent, who trouble themselves with it the least.

That there are different opinions in respect to religion, admits not of question: the world is full of contradictory speculations on this subject; and some of the grossest absurdities which the human mind ever conceived, have been found in systems of doctrine professedly derived from the word of God. If indeed you were required to frame a system of truth for yourelf, out of materials supplied by the various systems of religion in the world, without recourse to higher authority, you might well complain that it was an unreasonable and embarrassing requisition; and that your best efforts to come at the truth must result in nothing better than conjecture. But no such task is imposed upon you. *You have access to the very fountain of divine knowledge:* you are not only permitted, but required, to search the scriptures for yourself, using the writings of uninspired men only as helps to enable you to ascertain the mind of the Spirit. And you cannot plead as an apology for neglecting to search the scriptures, that there is any lack of explicitness in respect to the great truths which they reveal; for the Bible was designed equally for all; and of course for the poor and illiterate, who constitute a large part of

mankind ; and to suppose that its leading doctrines are hid under a mass of obscure and technical phraseology, were to charge the adorable Author of this revelation with trifling with the wants of his creatures. What then, my young friend, becomes of your excuse for neglecting religion, that you cannot ascertain what religion is? Open your Bible, and you will there find what it is, written in letters of light—all its great doctrines and precepts so perfectly intelligible, that the most simple and unlettered need not mistake them.

But suppose we admit that there are some things in the Bible which are hard to be understood—and to a certain extent no doubt this is true—but *is this a reason why you should reject or disregard what is plain*? Does the fact that you may not easily comprehend all the reasonings of Paul on the doctrine of justification, or all the allusions of the inspired writers to the then existing state of things, furnish any apology for your neglecting those plain precepts which require you to repent of your sins, and exercise faith in the atonement of Christ? Before you plead the obscurity of the Bible as a ground for neglecting religion, you must, to be consistent, show yourself ready to receive the truths which you cannot but acknowledge are clearly revealed ; and ready to practise the duties which you cannot fail to perceive are explicitly enjoined.

Say not then any longer, my young friend, that you do not know what religion is. If you do not know, rely on it, it is your own fault. In giving you the revelation of his Son, God has not been mocking your necessities, by saying one thing, and meaning another. Will such an excuse as this stand the test of the final day? Is there one among you, who would not shudder at the thought of standing before the omniscient Judge with such an apology ?

2. Youth often excuse themselves for the neglect of religion, on the ground that *it is gloomy;*—that it throws a damp on all the joys of life. This certainly is a very serious charge, and deserves to be particularly examined.

Suppose, however, that this representation were just, I would still maintain that *it did not amount even to the semblance of an apology* for neglecting religion; for it is never to be forgotten that it is religion, and that only, that saves the soul from eternal death, and secures to it everlasting life and glory. What then though religion were that chilling and comfortless thing which its enemies would sometimes represent it; what though it did require us to sacrifice all the enjoyments of social life, or even to undergo the most painful penance—the severest lacerations that nature can bear; what would all this be, compared with the loss of the immortal soul;—the tortures of the never-dying worm;—the ceaseless convulsions of the second death? I say then, that let religion require of us whatever present sacrifices it might, that man would be a fool who would not rather make them than expose himself to the agonies of perdition: for in the one case, the poor and pitiful pleasures of a moment, would be succeeded by scenes of undying anguish and despair: in the other, the privations and sufferings of this short life would be followed by everlasting ages of glory. Admitting this charge, therefore, which you bring against religion, in its full extent, we maintain that your conduct in neglecting it, is, on principles of reason, utterly indefensible.

But let us see whether there be any *validity* in this charge; whether it can be sustained either on the ground of reason, or on the ground of experience.

I admit indeed that *the process preparatory to the sinner's conversion is often a very painful one*, and is always accompanied by serious reflection and deep anxiety: for it were impossible that a soul should wake to its condition as lost, and exposed to the wrath of God, and re-

main unaffected by the woes of that condition. But this, though indispensable as a preparative for becoming religious, is not religion itself; and it were not more absurd to talk against the blessing of health, because the sick man must submit to some unpleasant prescriptions in order to regain it, than to condemn religion as gloomy, because you cannot partake its joys till you have felt the burden of conviction, and drank of the bitter waters of repentance.

Moreover, I am willing to admit that *there are some gloomy christians*;—persons who really have the love of God in their hearts, who are yet subject through life to a deep and settled melancholy. But this, instead of proving that religion is the parent of gloom, only proves either that some of the truths of religion are misapprehended, and thus perverted to minister to a gloomy habit, or else that the principle of religion is too feeble in its operations to counteract the various causes which may produce this effect. Nothing can be more unjust than to make religion answerable for the existence of evils, which, on account of the limited influence it has gained over the heart, it does not remove. Moreover, it admits of no question, that what is called religious depression is often to be referred to constitutional temperament, and the operation of other physical causes. So far as religion is concerned with it at all, it may safely be said that it is not religion, but the want of it, which operates to produce this effect.

In speaking of the delightful influence which religion is fitted to exert on the heart, I am aware that we labor under one disadvantage: it is, that we are supposed to be speaking to persons who are not only strangers to the joys of religion, but who actually have no relish for them. But if I mistake not, even such persons, if they would examine the gospel impartially, would find in it *no tendency* to a spirit of gloom. The gospel does indeed announce to man his ruined and wretched state;

but then it does nothing towards bringing him into that state, but on the contrary, it makes provision to bring him out of it. It cannot be denied that it speaks to the impenitent sinner the language of terror; but its practical tendency is to be estimated by its effect on those who do, and not upon those who do not, yield their hearts to its influence. And now let me ask you, what there is in it which is adapted to diffuse gloom over a sanctified soul? Is there any thing in the character of God—in his wisdom, goodness, mercy, or holiness, which is fitted to damp the christian's joys? Is there any thing gloomy in the thought that wherever he may be, he is surrounded by Jehovah's watchful care; and that even the most apparently untoward dispensations will finally redound to his greatest benefit? Is the glorious work of redemption by Christ—that work in which all the amiable and venerable attributes of the Godhead shine forth with transcendent lustre, fitted to shed mildew on the best comforts of the soul? Is there the semblance of gloom in the precious promises of the gospel;—in the promise that Jehovah will guide the christian by his counsel; that he will sustain him in the valley of death; and finally be his everlasting portion? If these and other kindred subjects are not fitted to dispel gloom, and inspire the soul with serenity and cheerfulness, I ask what subjects *are* adapted to produce this effect? The gospel then is not calculated to make men gloomy—how is it *in experience*.

I speak not here of those who merely bear the name of christians, but of those in whom religion is a living, acting, reigning principle; and of such I venture to say, that they are more consistently and uniformly cheerful than any other class. I do not mean that you will find them throwing themselves into the current of worldly levities; but I mean, that in all the various circumstances of life, you may see in them a dignified cheerfulness, equally remote from an unsocial austerity, or forbidding

gloom, on the one hand, and from a spirit of gay frivolity, on the other. Place such a person in the humble walks of life, and if you please, let the night clouds of *adversity* gather around him, and let him see one friend after another carried to the grave, and one fountain of earthly comfort after another dried up, till, to the eye of sense, his last hold of earthly enjoyment seems to be broken; and tell me whether you can imagine that peace and even joy can find its way into such a scene as this. I tell you, my young friend, that that christian is not bereft of consolation, though he may be bereft of every thing else: amidst all this desolation without, there is a peace that passeth understanding within: there is a holy confidence in God, a hope sure and stedfast, which is an anchor to the soul amidst all the storms of trouble that beat upon it. I speak not here, blessed be God, of rare occurrences; and I doubt not that some such cases as that which I have supposed, may have come under your observation; that you may have seen christian faith rising and triumphing under a weight of calamity which seemed to you absolutely insupportable. Surely, then, if religion *is* gloomy, she imparts no such influence in the day of adversity. She has, at least, one bright side; one friendly, helping hand, to wipe away the tears from the eye of the mourner, and to carry consolation to the heart, whose sorrows the world is utterly powerless to assuage.

But there is another and still darker scene through which we must all pass, in which religion is, by no means, an idle attendant. It is in that hour when all the poor helps that nature can yield us, are failing, and the soul that has not God for its refuge, is put upon its own naked resources, that religion most triumphantly refutes the charge of being gloomy. Did you ever, my young friend, see *a christian dying* in the exercise of a strong and elevated faith? Then I venture to say, you do not in your heart believe this charge against religion, which

I am considering. Draw nigh, ye incredulous ones, who have been accustomed to regard christianity as only the damper of human joy;—draw nigh to that scene of mingled agony and triumph, in which a disciple of Jesus is taking his departure for the eternal world? What now is the world any longer to him? And what can it do for him, in this hour of his extremity? Nothing. The chill damps of death are already upon his countenance; and the sinking, fluttering pulse proclaims that the conflict with the destroyer has begun. Friends may weep and break their hearts around his dying bed; though even they can do nothing to enable him to retain his hold on life a single hour. But amidst all the complicated natural horrors of the death scene, you may see that christian fearless and joyful. You may behold a lingering smile of triumph on the countenance over which the icy hand of the king of terrors is passing; and perhaps you may hear the praises of redeeming love—the hosannas of an almost disenthralled spirit, trembling on the tongue which, a few moments hence, will be motionless in death. And will you say, after all this, that religion is the parent of gloom? Go then to the dying bed of the sinner, and contrast what you have just seen with what you will there see: go and mark the phrenzied look, and listen to the frantic exclamation, and measure, if you can, the woes that are clustering on that departing spirit; and then say, if it is a gloomy thing to die with religion, what is it to die without it?

Thus I have endeavored to expose the fallacy of the plea that religion is gloomy, by showing that, if the charge were true, it would amount to no apology for the neglect of it; because it is this alone which secures our eternal happiness: but that, so far from being gloomy, it is in itself essentially a system of consolation; and that all experience proves that it yields support which can be derived from no other source, and in circumstances in which every thing else is completely unavailing.

And has not enough been said under this article to remove the delusion, if it has existed in any of your minds, that religion is too grave a concern for the buoyant spirits of youth; that though old age, or even manhood, may reasonably enough be brought under its claims, yet the young have a fair right to be exempted. Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing in religion that renders it unsuitable to your period of life. Its tendency is, not to repress the ardor of youth, but to give a right direction to it; not to dry up the sources of youthful enjoyment, but to enlarge and purify them. If you are told that, in becoming religious, you must yield yourself a victim to melancholy, believe not the slander for a moment. Be assured, on the other hand, that the "ways" of piety "are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

3. Another excuse which youth, in common with others, often plead for the neglect of religion, is drawn from *the infirmities and failings of professed christians*. These are often triumphantly pointed at as evidence that religion does not make men the better, and as an argument for treating it with indifference, if not with contempt.

But admit the fact that many who profess religion apostatize, and many others, in various ways, dishonor a christian professon, and all discover remains of moral corruption—Before you can use this as an argument to disprove the truth of the gospel, *you must be able to show that the gospel has either expressly, or by implication, declared that all who profess their faith in it are sincere christians;* in other words, that there is no such character as a hypocrite. But the gospel has made no such declaration: on the contrary, it was the master's own prediction that the tares and the wheat should be found together; and it is agreeable to the uniform tenor of the gospel, that christians in the present life are sanctified but in part. The alleged fact, then, of the imperfections of professed christians, instead of being an argument against

the truth of our religion, furnishes strong presumptive evidence in its favor; because it exactly verifies the declarations which the gospel has made in respect to the character of its professors.

But this notion which I am endeavoring to expose, is as much at war with *common sense*, as with scripture. Is it rational to infer from the fact that there was a Judas in the family of our Lord, that the disciples were all nothing better than a band of traitors? Or because there are professors of religion, at the present day, who prove themselves hypocrites, are we hence to infer that there are none in whom religion has its genuine operation? Or that the gospel itself is only a miserable forgery? What would you say of that kind of reasoning which should infer that the science of medicine or law was only a piece of imposture, from the fact that some men professing a knowledge of it were quacks or deceivers; or which should make every individual in the profession responsible for the ignorance or mismanagement of a few of its members? The truth is, that common sense decides that the character of each professed christian is to be judged independently of every other; and that the character of the gospel is to be estimated by its practical tendency. Examine the gospel, then, and see whether it does not condemn sin in every form, and in every class; and in no class more explicitly than in those who profess to be the followers of Christ: and in view of this fact, say whether the imputation which I am considering is not a foul slander on our holy religion.

And what, after all, is the amount of the fact alleged in this charge against religion? It is only that *some* of its professors dishonor the christian name; while it virtually admits (and certainly the most unblushing malice against the gospel cannot deny) that a considerable proportion of them adorn their profession by a holy life. And if the instances of apostacy, or lamentable declension, which occur among professing christians, prove that religion is

all a cheat, I ask, what, on the other hand, is proved by the fact *that so large a number persevere*, and exhibit, to the close of life, a holy conversation and deportment? The truth is, that the former of these facts proves nothing against religion in any way; for it is not to religion, but to the absence of it, that it is to be referred: whereas the latter furnishes decisive evidence that religion does exert a benign and controlling influence over the heart and life.

Say now, my young friend, will you dare to plead this apology for the neglect of religion any longer? Is it not a reflection upon your reason that you should have ever ventured to plead it all? That there are false professors we admit; but your situation as a sinner is just as alarming, as if there were not a false professor on earth. They indeed will suffer a tremendous doom: but whatever that may be, certain it is that the Bible denounces tribulation and anguish upon you; and if you continue in your present course, you may find, when it is too late to profit by the discovery, that the time you had spent in cavilling about the imperfections of professors, had been far better employed in mourning over your own sins, and gaining an interest in the great salvation.

4. The plea of *inability* is also urged to justify the neglect of religion.

I would ask the person who urges this plea, in the first place, whether *he really believes that he has done every thing toward the work of his renovation, that is in his power*? Have you reflected daily and habitually on your guilt and danger, and stedfastly resisted the temptations of the world, and sought intercourse with God's people, and availed yourself of every means within your power for becoming acquainted with your true condition and character, and yielding up your heart to God? And have you persevered in this course up to the present hour? If your conscience does not tell you that you have actually left nothing undone which it was in your power to do

towards the work of your salvation, then you have no right to urge the plea of inability. Nor have you a right, even in that case, to urge it; for who has told you, if your past efforts have been unavailing, that a persevering repetition of them may not accomplish the great object to which they are directed. If it is ever to be urged with even a semblance of plausibility, it must be in the last moments of your life, after all that has been in your power has been done, and to no purpose.

But this plea may be shown to be false in *another way*. The whole duty of man is summarily comprehended in love to God. But the reason why the sinner does not exercise this love, is not because he is destitute of affections; for he actually bestows them on objects innumerable, and infinitely less deserving of them than God. Nor is it because, in the exercise of these affections, he has not all the powers of a moral agent; for in all his moral exercises, he is conscious of perfect freedom. He can love the world with intense affection; and he can roll sin as a sweet morsel under his tongue: but when the most glorious being in the universe claims the homage of his heart, he coldly refuses the offering, and shelters himself behind the plea of inability. And what is the obvious construction of this conduct? Why manifestly this—that he is so bitter an enemy to holiness, and has such a cordial aversion to the character of God, that he cannot be reconciled to him. What would you think if your neighbor should insult you with such an apology for an injury he had done you? What would you think of the wretch who had burnt down your dwelling, or the assassin who had murdered your father, that should enter a court of justice, and plead his innocence on the ground of his malevolence towards your family? And think you that such an apology as this will satisfy the great God for the contempt poured upon his character? You surely dare not think of carrying this excuse to the judgment, unless you have made up your mind to encounter the agonies of perdition.

But if this plea were admitted, look at the *consequences* to which it would lead. If that kind of inability which consists in a simple aversion to the character and service of God, justifies the sinner in opposition to his character, and in declining his service, we arrive instantly at the absurd conclusion, that the more a man hates God, the less guilty he is ; and he that hates him with perfect hatred, is perfectly innocent.

Moreover, this plea is not only false and preposterous, but, in the highest degree, *insincere*. Could you hear the honest language of the sinner's heart, at the very moment this plea is upon his lips, it would be that he did not believe a word of it. For observe that this plea proceeds upon the supposition that heaven and hell are realities : the plea itself is nothing less than that he who offers it, is exposed every hour to suffer the pangs of the second death ; and yet that by the iron bars of fate, he is prevented from making his escape. If your dwelling were on fire, and some wretch had chained you down in such circumstances that you could not escape the devouring element, would you amuse yourself with the awful grandeur of the scene, or would you be distracted with terror at the anticipated horrors of the death that awaited you ? When we find you frantic with agony while you are offering this plea, we may acknowledge that there is at least some appearance of sincerity ; but till then, wonder not if we regard the plea as merely the suggestion of a spirit of rebellion.

But do you inquire whether the work of your salvation is to depend *entirely* on yourself : and whether the Spirit of God has nothing to do in bringing you to repentance ? I answer, the Spirit has a most important part to perform in this great work ; insomuch that without his agency, it would never be accomplished. But the Spirit, in his operations, contemplates you as active ; and if you remain with your arms folded, waiting for a visit from this divine agent, you may expect to wait till you die, and then die

in your sins. The way to enlist his renewing influences in your behalf, is to arise, and shake off your sluggishness, and plead mightily with God to have mercy upon you.

5. The only remaining excuse for the neglect of religion which I shall notice, is, that *there is time enough yet.*

And *what is it*, my young friend, for which you are so sure that you have time enough remaining? Is it merely a momentary turning of your thoughts away from the world, or yielding yourself for an hour to the impression of eternal things, or performing a little lip service which you call prayer, or doing the drudgery of a few external duties? Oh no, it is nothing like this: it is the breaking off right hand sins: it is the mortification of evil affections: it is the yielding up the whole heart to God: it is the consecration of the whole man to his service and glory. And is this a work of so small moment that you can safely put it off to another day, on the ground that there is time enough yet for the performance of it?

Besides, let it not be forgotten that religion *lays its demands upon all your faculties and affections, through every moment of your existence.* Have you time enough then for doing that hereafter which devolves upon you at this moment, when each future moment will bring with it its own appropriate duties? If all that you can possibly do in the next hour, is demanded of you during that hour, how will you find time then for doing the duties which devolve upon you now? Perhaps, however, you only mean that there is time enough yet—that is, some more convenient season than the present—for exercising that repentance of sin which is necessary to secure your salvation.

But there are two things of which you ought to feel absolutely assured, before you make up your mind to defer repentance to *any* future period. In the first place, in order to justify such a resolution, you must be certain of the continuance of life. You must have gained an assurance

that, notwithstanding the arrows of death are thickly flying around you, and every day numbers its victims for the tomb; yet, amidst all this desolation, your life, for some indefinite period, shall certainly be preserved. And this you must know on the authority of Him in whose hand your breath is; for He only who fixes the bounds of our habitation, is competent to assure you of the continuance of life even for a moment. And then again, you must be assured that God will grant you grace to repent, and will accept your repentance at a future day. You must be able to point to some declaration in the Bible, which makes it certain that the Holy Spirit, whose influences you now resist, will hereafter visit your soul again; and if he should, that you will be more disposed to cherish his influences than you are now. But on both these points, you cannot but know that the evidence is all against you. There is a voice from a thousand graves, admonishing you that you cannot presume on the continuance of life, even till to-morrow; and there is the practical testimony of many a sinner, whose heart, by procrastination, has become as hard as the nether millstone, that in calculating on the future efficacious operations of the Holy Spirit, you have all probability against you.

But if you persevere in saying that there is time enough yet, let me ask you to *define the particular period* which you have allotted to the performance of this work. Is it the period of *middle age*? Look then, I pray you, to the man who has actually reached that period, and judge candidly whether his advantages for becoming religious are increased beyond what they were in the season of youth. Is there any thing in the pressure of worldly care, in the claims of a rising family, in the numerous and distracting demands upon time, which that period so commonly brings with it, that is favorable to the work of repentance —a work which demands reflection, and self-communion, and abstraction from the world. And if middle age does

not furnish better *advantages* than youth for becoming religious, let me ask again, is it more likely to bring with it the *disposition*? Is it in accordance with the known principles of human nature, that a habit of any kind should grow weaker by being cherished? Or may not the exact opposite of this be anticipated, with as much confidence as any effect can be looked for from its appropriate cause? And if experience be consulted, where are the individuals to testify that familiarity with the world has strengthened the resolution or the desire to become religious? No, my young friends, the difference between the period to which you are looking forward, and that through which you are now passing, is altogether in favor of the latter: If, therefore, you leave the season of youth strangers to religion, it is more than probable, if your life should be spared, that you will leave the season of manhood with the same character.

But possibly when you say that there is time enough yet, you are looking forward to a period still more distant—to the season of *old age*. I cannot forbear saying, at the outset, that it is only possible that you may live to that period; the chances, according to the principles of human calculation, being altogether against you. But suppose, by a comparatively rare dispensation, your life should be protracted even to fourscore years, I ask you what there will be in your condition then to facilitate the great work to which I am urging you? With a mind not improbably broken by age, or paralyzed by disease; with habits which have been the regular growth of almost a century; with little of the power, and still less of the disposition, to reflect closely or for a long time upon any subject;—is there not little probability that the great work of repentance will ever be seriously thought of—still less, earnestly attempted—least of all, actually performed? I know there is here and there a miracle of mercy wrought in the conversion of an aged sinner; but when such instances occur, they occasion surprise, and every christian

is ready to exclaim, "What hath God wrought!" Is it not, my young friend, to stake *your* immortal interests on such a fearful uncertainty!

But I am not certain that there are none of you, who, in pleading that there is time enough yet, may not be secretly flattering yourselves with the hope of *a death-bed repentance*. But do you really think that you shall be able to meet and answer the claims which God makes upon you, by the convulsive efforts of your last hour? Who then has told you that, after you have spent a life of rebellion against God, he will grant you grace to repent, while the last moments of your probation are on the wing? Or where has God promised that he will listen to that cry for mercy which is prompted by the terrors of an opening retribution? Or how do you know that you may not, like multitudes of others, die in a state of spiritual insensibility, being actually abandoned of God to a reprobate mind? Or what evidence have you that your last sickness may not be the sickness of a moment, and your passage into eternity in the twinkling of an eye? Or if it should be protracted, who can tell but that you may be given up to the wild horrors of delirium, and be utterly insensible to your condition, until death has actually done its work? I say nothing in respect to particular instances of death-bed repentance; but in general, there is every thing to show that little or no dependence is to be placed upon them. Oh beware how you defer the concerns of religion till your closing hour!

What then, my young friends, is the great practical inference from all that has been said under this article, and from the general tenor of this discourse? It is this: "*Behold now*"—*now in the days of your youth*—"*is the accepted time.*" We have examined the apologies with which you are prone to put off religion, and have shown you that they amount to nothing. Dismiss not, I entreat

, the practical contemplation of this subject, till the effect of it has been to make you realize that there is no time to be lost in securing your immortal interests; to prepare you to ask with agonizing earnestness, the momentous question, "What must I do to be saved?"

LECTURE IX.

AWAKING TO RELIGION.

ACTS XVI. 30.

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

The circumstances which led to this momentous inquiry, were deeply interesting. Paul and Silas had gone into Macedonia, preaching the gospel; and having come to Philippi, they were arrested by the magistrates of the city, scourged, and thrown into a dungeon. The jailer having received a strict charge to keep them safely, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. It is one of the glories of the gospel that it does not restrict its blessings to any condition in life; that its richest consolations may be enjoyed as well in a dungeon as in a palace: and hence we find that the blessed Saviour appeared marvellously for these persecuted men. That they would be engaged in prayer, it were natural to expect; but the walls of their prison are made to echo not only to the voice of prayer, but of praise; for we are expressly informed that "they sang praises to God." At this moment there was a great earthquake which shook the prison, so that the doors were thrown open, and the keeper awoke in the utmost consternation. Supposing the prisoners to have escaped, which would have been at the forfeiture of his life, he drew his sword, and was nearly in the act of destroying himself, when Paul—the same

Paul whom he had just before confined in a dungeon—with much of his master's benevolence, cries out, "Do thyself no harm, for we are all here." "Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

It is not easy, nor, for my present purpose, important, to determine, whether the jailer had ever heard the gospel before this time; whether any conversation had previously taken place between him and the apostles, which originated these convictions; or whether the light which he received, was directly communicated at the time by the Holy Spirit: It is sufficient for us to know that he really became an anxious inquirer on the subject of his salvation.

It will occur to you, my young friends, that the preceding discourse was occupied with an examination of some of the excuses, with which youth are prone to put off the claims of religion. I would fain hope that there are those among you, who have become satisfied of the worthlessness of these excuses, and have resolved never more to plead one of them—not even at the bar of conscience. Nay more, I would indulge the hope that you have not only given up your apologies, but that you have become impressed with the importance of your soul's salvation; insomuch that when you heard the text announced, your heart instantly responded to the sentiment contained in it, as one in which you have the deepest personal interest. In the hope which I have now expressed, it is my purpose, in the present discourse, to inquire into the meaning of this momentous question, with a view to place distinctly before you that state of mind commonly called CONVICTION OF SIN; that you may be assisted, on the one hand, to decide upon the character of your religious impressions, and on the other, to gain such a view of your condition as shall be necessary to lead you to escape from the wrath to come.

What then is the *import* of the question contained in the text—"What must I do to be saved?"

I. I observe, first, it is the language of *deep feeling*.

There are comparatively few in christian communities, who are not ready to give a general assent to the truth of the gospel; and far the larger part, at least, among ourselves, will not hesitate to avow their belief of the most humbling of its doctrines. Of the deep depravity of man, and of their own personal guilt and pollution, they will profess not to entertain a doubt; and yet the practical influence of this belief is absolutely nothing. With an avowed conviction that they are constantly exposed to the miseries of the second death, they go their way, one to his farm, and another to his merchandize; and yield themselves up to the cares or the follies of the world, apparently with as much avidity, and as little apprehension, as if there were no heaven to be gained or lost. Nay, there are those who not only profess to believe the truths of which I have spoken, but in words contend earnestly for their importance, in whose hearts they have never produced a throb of anxiety, and over whose path they have never cast a shade of gloom. The truth is, that *their* belief of them is merely speculative. There is nothing in it to rouse, or agitate, or subdue the soul. In spite of it, the sinner may slumber even on the borders of the world of despair.

Far different is the spirit which prompted the inquiry in the text, and which discovers itself in the exercises of every convinced sinner. There is here not only the assent of the understanding, but the feeling of the heart. The sinner not only speculatively believes his guilt and danger, but practically realizes it. In the one case, the truths which he believes, are like objects seen in the mist, or by twilight: in the other, they resemble objects viewed in the brightness of noon-day. In the one case, it is as if you were to contemplate some temporal calamity, of

which you regarded yourself in little or no danger: in the other, it is as if you were to contemplate the same calamity, while you were actually sinking under its power.

I have said that the question in the text indicates *deep* feeling; but I do not mean that it is, in all cases, *alike*. With some, it is little more than settled seriousness; with others, it is strong anxiety; and with others still, it is unmixed agony. This variety of experience may be referred to a difference in the original constitution of the mind; or in the previous moral habits; or in the instruction which is communicated; or many other circumstances, which may, or may not, fall within our observation. But in *every* case, the truth is felt, not merely assented to: it seizes hold of the active principles of the soul, and is not kept locked up in the intellect.

II. This is the language of *strong self-condemnation*.

The process by which the sinner becomes impressed with a sense of his guilt, originates in the new view which he gains of the *divine law*. Hitherto, his views of that law have been loose and vague: he has practically regarded it as taking cognizance only of the external act; and not improbably has flattered himself that, if he were decent in his outward deportment, he should thereby yield an obedience to the law which might be accepted as a ground of his justification. But under the enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit, his mistakes on this subject are all corrected; and the law of God, instead of being regarded as little more than a dead letter, is felt, like the Omniscient eye, to be a Searcher of the heart; and like the Almighty hand, to operate with a resistless energy. It is seen, moreover, to be altogether worthy of its author; perfectly reasonable and just in its requisitions; an admirable transcript of the moral perfections of God.

Now you easily see how this new view of the divine law operates to produce conviction of guilt. If the law

has its foundation in everlasting righteousness, and is perfectly holy, just, and good ; if it is that which binds together the moral kingdom of Jehovah, and is an exact expression of his will in respect to all his intelligent creatures, then how evil and bitter a thing must sin be, which is the violation of this law : how deserving of God's supreme abhorrence must be that evil, which pours contempt upon his character, and insolently tramples upon his authority ! It is in view of the *moral excellence* of the law, then, that the sinner discovers and estimates the inherent odiousness of sin : but in estimating his own personal guilt, he more especially takes into view the *extent of its requisitions ;* considering it as designed to control the inner man of the heart ; as extending to every thought, and purpose, and motive, and desire, through every period of man's existence.

How differently does the sinner now estimate the *number* of his sins, from what he did before he practically understood the comprehensive import of God's law ! Time has been, it may be, when he scarcely considered himself a sinner at all ; and when, if he had undertaken to reckon with his conscience, he would have thought only of flagrant acts of transgression, and would have estimated the guilt even of them chiefly by their untoward influence upon society. But now he is almost exclusively occupied in calling up sins of the heart ; sins of every day, and hour, and moment ; sins of which the world never took cognizance, and of which, at the time they were committed, he scarcely took cognizance himself. He sees that he has been living in constant rebellion against God ; that he has steadily and perseveringly refused a practical acknowledgment of his authority ; and that too against motives of the most tender and affecting import. He charges himself with the blackest ingratitude ; for when he looks back upon his past life, he sees that he has been continually led by a most gracious hand, and that blessings have constantly multiplied in his path ;

and yet he beholds no monuments of grateful homage ; no Ebenezers on which is inscribed " Hitherto hath the Lord helped me." Perhaps he has been a diligent attendant on the means of grace ; has been regularly at the sanctuary, and it may be has even daily read the scriptures, and sometimes fallen upon his knees, and taken upon his lips the language of devotion ; and in all this, he may have formerly thought that he was doing much to commend himself to the divine favor : but now he sees nothing better in these services, by which he had deceived himself, and perhaps deceived others also, than the hollow homage of a formalist ; and here, as truly as any where, he reads the sentence of his condemnation. How many complaining reflections does he find himself to have indulged against God, because he may have sometimes in mercy blasted his foolish purposes, or withheld from him something which, if it had been bestowed, would have ministered only to his destruction ! How large a part of all the thoughts that he has ever had, does he find, on review, to have been vain and evil ; how many of his words have been idle and frivolous ; how many of his purposes have originated in pride or revenge ; how many of his desires have been polluted and grovelling ; how many actions which to the eye of man may have appeared praiseworthy and even noble, does he now perceive to have been dictated not merely by a spirit of forgetfulness of God, but by a spirit of active rebellion against him. In short, his sins of omission or commission, of heart or life, appear as numerous as the moments of his existence ; and he feels that an effort to recal them all to remembrance, were as vain as to attempt to count the drops in the ocean.

But while the convinced sinner dwells with astonishment on the number of his sins, or rather finds them literally innumerable, he is equally overwhelmed by a sense of their *aggravation*. He perceives that they are not the sins of a heathen, who has never heard of Christ

or salvation; but they have been committed, it may be, in the very brightest sunshine of gospel day. They have been committed, while the Bible, with all its awful warnings, and all its gracious invitations, and all its treasures of mercy, has been within his reach; while the Sabbath has weekly dawned upon him, and the sanctuary has opened its doors for him, and the ministers of Christ have spread before him the provision of the gospel, and have expostulated with him to attend to the things that belong to his peace. They have been committed, moreover, in spite of the kind rebukes and earnest entreaties of pious friendship; in spite of the remonstrances of his own conscience; in spite of the strivings of the Holy Spirit; in spite of all the condescension, the agonies, and the intercession of Jesus; in spite of the proffered glories of heaven, and the threatened woes of perdition. The fact that he has sinned against so much light and love, and that he has persevered in sinning, when there were so many considerations to deter him from it, seems to him to stamp upon his guilt a peculiarly aggravated character.

And then again, he perceives how perfectly vain and foolish were the *excuses* with which he had quieted himself in a sinful course: he is compelled to give them all to the winds, and to feel that he stands before God without the shadow of an apology. Does he justify his past neglect of religion, on the ground that he had no time to attend to it; or on the ground that, in attending upon the means of grace, he had done all that it was in his power to do; or on the ground that there would be a future more convenient season? No such thing. He feels that his sins have been altogether voluntary and causeless, and have exposed him *most justly* to God's threatened curse. It is a common case that a sinner in these circumstances actually believes himself to be the most guilty of all beings, even worse than the reprobate in hell; for while he can invent apologies for others, he cannot for a moment admit any for himself. He is not indeed, as some dream-

ing speculatists would have it, *willing* to encounter eternal perdition; but that he *deserves* it, is as clear to him as that the light shines around him amidst the brightness of noon-day. He wonders that such a wretch as himself is permitted to breathe the air, or enjoy the light, or walk upon the earth; and it is difficult for him to believe that his next remove will not be to the prison of despair.

I have already intimated that there is, in some respects, a great variety in the experience of convinced sinners, some being far more deeply affected than others. But in every case which issues in conversion, there is not only a general conviction of the evil of sin, but a particular conviction of personal guilt, and of the justice of the sentence which dooms to God's everlasting displeasure. This conviction may be acquired suddenly, or it may be acquired gradually: it may be more or less pungent: but in some form or other, and in some degree or other, it makes part of the experience of every sinner, who is brought to a practical knowledge of the excellence and glory of the gospel.

III. This is the language of *earnest solicitude*.

Enough has been said to show that the disclosures which are made to the convinced sinner by the Spirit of God, must render him, in no small degree, unhappy; and such a state necessarily produces solicitude, both in respect to the present and the future. It is natural that the sinner should earnestly desire a deliverance from the burden that now oppresses him, and from the appalling doom which conscience bids him anticipate in the next world.

If there were nothing more than his *present condition* concerned, there would be good reason why he should long for a change; for such a condition is always unhappy, and often wretched beyond our most gloomy conceptions. What christian, especially what minister of Christ, has not witnessed cases, in which the sinner in the circumstances which I am supposing, has been stung

by remorse, agitated by terror, convulsed by agony, to such a degree, that life itself has seemed a burden; and the aspect of despair has settled upon the countenance; and even the grave has been longed for, if it might but prove a refuge from the lashes of a guilty conscience. But where the operations of the Spirit assume a milder form, and the impressions of guilt are far less pungent, there is still enough in the sinner's condition to cause him earnestly to desire that he may escape from it. For he feels that while this burden hangs upon his conscience, the world is nothing better to him than a prison, overspread with darkness, and hung round with despair.

But if the sinner is anxious, and with good reason too, to escape from the miseries of his present condition, much more is he desirous to escape from the accumulated woes which await the ungodly *in the world of despair*. He realizes that there is an awful meaning in the description which the Bible has given of the future and eternal miseries of the lost; and he ponders the fearful imagery in which those miseries are described, till his heart throbs and sinks with apprehension. Here again, is it strange that he is anxious to escape from this tremendous doom? Rather, would it not be passing strange, if, with such a view of the danger of his condition, he could fold his arms and lull himself into an indolent security?

It is not always easy for the sinner in the state which I am supposing, to analyze the operations of his own mind. And if it is difficult for him to understand the nature of his emotions, he is still more perplexed to know in what manner he may obtain peace. Often, the most that he can say respecting himself is, that there is an intolerable burden resting upon his conscience; that he knows not which way to look for relief; that all around him and before him, is impenetrable darkness. And not unfrequently, the burden of his anxiety is that, with such just occasion for distress, he feels so little;

and while, to all others but himself, he seems to be on the borders of despair, *he* imagines that he is utterly destitute of moral sensibility. In these circumstances, he adopts, in many respects, a new course of life. If he has been accustomed to mingle in scenes of levity, he mingles in such scenes no longer. The Bible, and other religious books, which he has been used to treat with entire neglect, he reads with most earnest attention. He rejoices in the opportunity, though he often does it with great diffidence, to unbosom himself to his minister, or some christian friend, and to receive appropriate instruction and counsel. He is often found in the meeting for prayer and religious conference, and still oftener in his closet, pouring out the anguish of his heart before God. You may tell him that a sinner ought not to pray; but the false direction he will not heed; for though he feels no confidence that he shall be saved, let him do what he will, yet if he *is* saved, he is sure that it must be by an act of God's sovereign grace, and that grace he has no reason to expect, if he does not supplicate it. His former careless associates, not improbably, during this period, look on with amazement, and perhaps treat his serious impressions with ridicule; but what avails all their ridicule with him, so long as his eyes are open to survey the appalling realities of his condition?

Do you ask whether, in all this striving of which I have here spoken, the sinner advances any nearer to the kingdom of God, or to a regenerate state? I answer, yes, undoubtedly; though I would guard the answer by an explanation. It is far from being true, that the sinner, by any effort he can make, does any thing in the way of merit towards commending himself to the divine favor; nor do any of his moral exercises preparatory to renovation partake of a holy character: nevertheless, these efforts seem designed, in the economy of God's grace, to prepare him to accept a free salvation; and though there be nothing of a moral character in the prayers that are

offered previous to conversion, which God can regard with approbation, yet there is the natural feeling of distress; and who can tell but that He who hears the cry of the young ravens, may not listen to the cry of the convinced sinner? To whatever conclusions men may be conducted on this subject by metaphysical speculation, all experience unites with the word of God in proving that, though the sinner who is only convinced will as certainly perish as any other, yet the convinced sinner is, in an important sense, nearer the kingdom than the careless sinner; not because he has a particle of holiness, but because he has exercises which, in the order of nature, are preparatory to a spiritual renovation. If our Lord himself could say of a mere moral man, that he was not far from the kingdom of God, surely we need not hesitate to apply the same language to a sinner trembling under the burden of conviction.

I have now laid before you, my young friends, so far as I have judged necessary, the exercises and the condition of a sinner, in what is usually termed a state of conviction. In this situation I must, for the present, leave him. It is natural to infer,

1. In the first place, from the preceding remarks, *how far you may go, and finally fall short of heaven.* Are you, at this moment, an anxious and heavy laden sinner? Have your iniquities taken hold upon you, so that you are not able to look up; and are you trembling under the apprehensions of Jehovah's wrath? Have you forsaken the haunts of levity, and broken away from vain companions, and have you taken up the resolution that you will press forward and enter in at the straight gate? Believe me, so far as this, you may go, and even farther, and yet perish in your sins. All this you may be to-day, and the world may have begun to regain its ascendancy over you to-morrow, and before you are yet scarcely aware of any change, you may find yourself again in the ranks of the gay and careless. Nay, you may continue

in this very state till you die; you may always remain a serious inquirer for the way to heaven, and may even lie at its very gate, and yet, after all, may never enter in. Wherefore, I entreat you not to rest satisfied in your present condition. It would be to no purpose that you should discover that some distressing worldly calamity was hanging over you, unless the discovery should lead you to do something to avert it; nor will it be of any avail that you see yourselves exposed to eternal perdition, unless you actually make haste to escape from the wrath to come. Let the effect of the disclosures already made to you by the Spirit of God, lead you to action; else you will not only perish, but perish with a doom aggravated by the very fact that you have been the subject of serious convictions.

2. Learn from this subject, that *it is a most solemn thing, especially for a young person, to be awakened.* It is indeed a solemn thing for *any* person; because he is thereby brought under the direct influence of the Spirit of God; and in the result of the Spirit's operation is probably to be decided the question, whether his immortal soul is to be saved or lost; whether his path through life is to be cheered by the hopes and consolations of religion, and to terminate amid the bright glories of the upper world, or whether he is to go laboring through this vale of tears without any substantial support, often disgusted, and never satisfied, with what the world has to bestow, and finally to sink down under the withering frown of the Almighty, and be banished from his presence for ever. I say then, that the fearful result which is pending, renders the case of *any* awakened sinner peculiarly solemn; but the case of a young person, in such circumstances, gathers additional interest from the fact that he is surrounded with peculiar temptations to abandon his convictions, and return to a habit of carelessness. For in his case there are gay companions to be forsaken, and there are scenes of merriment to be abandoned, in

which, it may be, the individual concerned, has been specially active; and not improbably there is the hiss of contempt, or the frown of indignation, to be encountered, from those who have been accustomed to greet him as one of themselves. Oh, when I see a young person in these circumstances, I tremble; because I expect that the decision he is about to make will be for eternity; and I see much reason to fear that his decision will be wrong.

3. And this leads me to say, thirdly, that *those youth who dare to trifle with the serious convictions of their companions, are in the very broadest part of the road to destruction.* They trifle with the immediate influence of the Spirit of God. They cast contempt upon the most benevolent work which he ever performs for mortals. They make a direct and most dreadful attempt to thwart the gracious purposes of heaven, and plunge an immortal soul into everlasting burnings. If I supposed there were a single youth before me who bore the character of a scoffer, I would say to him, Beware—beware how you ever speak lightly again of the work of the Holy Spirit. And possibly some of you may have been guilty of the essence of this sin, when you have thought little about it. When you met your brother or sister, whose countenance wore an aspect of anxiety, and you purposely threw out some light and careless remark, or perhaps cast a significant smile, as if in derision, know that that brother or sister felt it at the heart, as a cruel and cutting rebuke; and know too, that he who takes an account of all your actions, recorded it as an insult shown to his authority, and an attempt to counteract the influences of his Spirit. And when, as you were passing off the threshold of this house, you met some companion whom you had seen melted under the warnings, or invitations, which had just been announced, and when you took that companion by the hand and said, "Come, let us go and talk of the pleasures of the past week, or project plans of amusement

for the week to come,"—know too, that you were then opposing the operations of the Spirit of God, and aiming a murderous dagger at the soul of your friend. I say nothing which is not the result of solemn conviction, when I declare, that I would a thousand times rather my dearest friend should come and trifle with my last agonies, and dance around the bed on which my cold and motionless body was stretched, and close my dying eyes with a loud peal of laughter, than to have him approach me with ridicule, when my heart was burdened with conviction; for in the one case, he would only chill the last blood that passes through my veins; in the other, he might awaken everlasting agonies in my soul.

Finally: I dare not close this discourse without urging you (though in doing so, I should seem to anticipate my next subject) to *an immediate compliance with the terms of the gospel:* because, if I should be spared to stand in this place again, to answer the question, "What shall I do to be saved?" some of you may, before that time, have heard your last sermon, and have passed into that world where the voice of instruction cannot reach you. I call upon you then to attend without delay to this momentous concern; to obey the command of God to give him your heart; and I seem to hear a call in every thing around me, conveying to you a similar admonition. There is a call from above, which I recognize as coming from the throne of God, and inviting you to all the glories of his kingdom. There is a call from below, which seems to come from the abodes of darkness, echoed in groans, and agonies, and tortures, warning you to beware how you withhold the heart from God another day. There is a call from within, which bids you take care and not sacrifice your immortal souls. There is a call in the memory of departed worldly joys, admonishing you that they are worthless, and bidding you seek superior bliss. There is a call from the dying bed of the christian, and the dying bed of the sinner; the

one pointing upward, by way of invitation, to the glories of heaven; the other downward, by way of admonition, to the horrors of hell. But above all, there is a call from the cross of Calvary—from the Saviour in the act of dying for your redemption; and his language is, "Come unto me, all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Mourning sinner, that call is to you—to no mortal more than you. Away then with all this halting and hesitating, and accept of Jesus, and your conscience will be at rest; your soul will be full of peace and hope; and joy will descend from heaven, and take up her dwelling in your bosom.

LECTURE X.

EMBRACING RELIGION.

ACTS XVI. 31.

BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THOU SHALT BE SAVED.

In this passage, we have the apostle's answer to the momentous question of the jailer, to which your attention was directed in the preceding lecture. As I endeavored there to exhibit before you the process preparatory to becoming a christian, usually styled *conviction of sin*, I design now to advance a step farther, and call your attention to that great change which the soul experiences in passing from death unto life.

You perceive, my young friends, that we have now reached a most interesting point in human experience. But I fear I have already advanced one step farther than most of you have been prepared to accompany me; and that, in bringing before you the case of a convinced sinner, I have turned your thoughts to a subject upon which you have not, to this hour, had any experience. Nevertheless, I cannot stay, at present, to reason with you in respect to the guilt or danger of your condition. I will only put the question to your conscience, whether the fact that you cannot go along with me any farther, may not have a fearfully ominous bearing upon your eternal destiny? There are some, I would fain hope,

before me, who *do* realize all that was described in the preceding discourse; and who have come this morning, earnestly desiring to have the great question answered, in what way they may obtain the pardon of their sins, the blessing of a pacified conscience, and a title to eternal life. It is for such youth especially that this discourse is designed; and may God the Holy Spirit bring it home to their hearts with a subduing and all-gracious energy!

It may be worth while, before proceeding to consider the direction which the apostle, in our text, gives to a convinced sinner, to advert, for a moment, to some false directions which the advocates of error, of various classes, are wont to give in similar circumstances: for if there be any subject on which it is important that you should accurately discriminate between truth and error, and on which, from various circumstances, you are in danger of being misled, it is in respect to the terms of your acceptance with God.

One class of advisers will tell you that, in order to be saved, *you must maintain a correct deportment before the world, and especially that you must be honest in your intercourse with your fellow-men.* They say that God is not a hard master; and that if your lives are such that you obtain a good report among men, no doubt you will stand acquitted by your Judge. And is it so, then, that he who looks directly at the heart, will estimate the character of actions, merely by the outward appearance? Or will he who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, connive at the prevalence of a spirit of rebellion in the heart, merely because the lips, and the hands, and the body, are moved in a way that does not interfere with the worldly interests of our fellow-men? They who give this direction to the inquiring sinner, are guilty of making Jehovah altogether such an one as themselves. To say nothing of God's word, reason spurns at such a prescription for a guilty conscience, and assures the sinner

that, if he adopts it, it must be at the expense of losing his soul.

Another class, advancing a step farther, will tell you that, if you would be saved, you must not only be sober and moral, but *generous*, *affectionate*, *benevolent:* these traits, you are told, constitute the moral perfection of human nature, and will ensure to you an entrance into heaven. Such advisers confound naturally amiable tempers with gracious affections, making no difference between the exalted principle of love to God and gratitude to the Saviour, and those instinctive qualities which belong to us in common with some of the brute creation. They deny the doctrine of human depravity, and maintain that there is no necessity of a divine influence to sanctify the heart. How can this answer be given, when the Bible every where proclaims the doctrine that man is "dead in trespasses and sins;" and that "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God?"

A third class will tell you that more is necessary in order to salvation, than is comprehended in either of the preceding directions;—that *there are duties which you owe to God* as well as man; that besides being honest and benevolent in your intercourse with the world, you are bound to read the Bible, and pray, and attend church; but that if you do this, all will be well. These are pharisaical guides. They think to catch and please the eye of Omniscience, by a round of external duties, when the heart has no part nor lot in the matter. They are chargeable with mistaking the means for the end; with substituting rites and forms for the life and power of godliness.

A fourth class will acknowledge that we are sinners, and cannot be saved, except by the atonement of Christ: they say, however, that, by our good works, *we may merit salvation in part*, and that the righteousness of Christ will be appropriated to supply the deficiency. In opposition to this theory, the Bible uniformly represents

man as having contracted a debt to divine justice, which he can do nothing to cancel; as being altogether dependent for salvation on God's rich and sovereign mercy; and as ascribing the glory of his salvation to his Redeemer's blood and righteousness.

A fifth class will answer the awakened sinner's inquiry, by saying that nothing is necessary to salvation, but *a simple reliance on the merits of Christ*, without any regard to the temper of the heart, or the conduct of the life. The law, they will say, has been magnified by Christ's death, in such a sense, that we are released from its obligation; and if you only believe that *he died for you in particular*, you need give yourself little concern about personal holiness. Thus says the unblushing Antinomian; and that too in the very face of the declaration that 'without holiness no man shall see the Lord.'

"But none of these directions," methinks I hear you say, "yield any solid peace to my soul. I feel that I am a condemned sinner, and need the expiation of my guilt. I feel that I am a polluted sinner, and need the aid of a sanctifying power. I feel that I have no righteousness of my own, and I need one that is perfect. My soul, sinking under the burden of its sins, turns away from these blind guides, and looks anxiously round for some relief; but finds none till it reposes in the simple answer contained in my text—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

What then, you will inquire, is the NATURE OF THAT FAITH on which is suspended so momentous a result?

I answer, it includes, as one of its primary elements, an *intellectual assent to the great truths of the gospel*—especially that which constitutes its most prominent and glorious feature—the doctrine of redemption by the blood of Christ. I dare not say that, in some cases in which the opportunity does not exist for becoming acquainted with this truth, the Spirit of God may not, in some mysterious way, exert his renewing influence upon

the heart; though if the fact *be* so, the word of God has given us no intimation of it: nor would I venture to say with how much indistinctness this doctrine may be viewed, or with how much erroneous speculation it may be connected, and still be the power of God unto salvation. But I may say with confidence, that no person, with the Bible in his hand, can intellectually reject this doctrine, and yet believe to the salvation of his soul. The fact that Jesus Christ, by the peculiar constitution of his person, is fitted to be our Mediator, that in this character he has made an atonement for sin, in virtue of which God can be just and yet the justifier of the ungodly, and that this atonement constitutes the only ground of hope to the sinner—so much as this, it would seem, must be understood and assented to, as the first step towards exercising evangelical faith. These facts you are to believe, just as you would believe any other facts which come to you established by proper testimony.

But notwithstanding this intellectual assent of which I have spoken, to the doctrine of redemption by the blood of Christ, is one of the essential constituents of saving faith, it does not of itself constitute it. You may believe this truth intellectually, and you may even be fierce advocates for it, and after all it may remain in your mind as a dead letter, and you may die in your sins. If you will have that faith which ensures salvation, the truth must descend from the head to the heart; it must assert and maintain its dominion over the affections; thus purifying the fountains of moral action, and becoming the seed of all christian graces, and gradually bringing the whole man into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Saving faith, then, is a *practical, influential belief of the scripture doctrine of redemption.* The truth is first received into the understanding, and then exerts its legitimate influence upon the heart. And this influence discovers itself, first, in an act of self-abasement, or giving up every idea of personal merit; and then in an act of self-

consecration, or giving up the whole soul to God, in humble reliance on the merits of Christ, to be employed in his service, to be disposed of at his pleasure, and to be saved by his sovereign mercy. It may be that the intellectual views of the sinner have in all this undergone little or no change; he may have always been as evangelical in his opinions as he is now: but his faith, instead of being a cold assent, as formerly, is now a cordial confidence; instead of exerting no influence, it is a powerful principle of action. Who does not perceive that this representation is exactly co-incident with that of the apostle, when he says, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness."

But you will inquire whether there are not *other truths* beside the great doctrine of redemption, which it belongs to evangelical faith to receive, and which are fitted to constrain the affections and influence the life. I answer, there is no truth revealed in the Bible which we are not required to believe, not only with the understanding, but with the heart; and none which is not fitted to exert a practical influence. Nevertheless it is the doctrine of Christ crucified, than which the apostle determined not to know any thing else in his preaching, the reception of which is more immediately concerned in the sinner's justification; for in practically believing this, the sinner lets go his own righteousness as a ground of justification, and rests entirely on the atoning blood and perfect righteousness of the Redeemer. Moreover, this truth is to be regarded not only as a cardinal doctrine of the christian system, but when viewed in all its connexions, as constituting the entire system; so that he who believes it intelligently, actually believes the whole gospel. And hence you readily perceive that any error in religious faith becomes important, as it is more or less nearly connected with the doctrine of redemption by the blood of Christ; just as an error in the construction of a building becomes more serious, the more intimately it is related to the foundation.

Let me here definitely state what has all along been implied—that the sinner is never brought to exercise evangelical faith, or to rest his all upon the Saviour, till he has gained a thorough conviction that there is salvation in no other. And this is often the result of a long course of self-righteous efforts: God permits him to take his own way, and thoroughly to test the efficacy of means, until he is driven to the blood of Christ as his last and only refuge; and when by faith he comes to receive the Saviour, and the peace-speaking blood of Christ is applied to his soul, and he rejoices in God as a reconciled father, he wonders that he has not complied with the terms of the gospel before. He perceives that his faith in the Saviour was a perfectly voluntary act, and that he has remained in darkness only because he *would* not come to the light of life. It is true indeed that the *evidence* of faith may not, in all cases, immediately accompany its *exercise;* and the soul may be left in darkness for a season, even after it has a right to appropriate to itself the consolations of a christian hope: but in many instances at least, the first act of confidence in the Saviour draws down upon the soul the tokens of his love, and surrounds it with the light of his countenance. The soul embraces its Saviour in the arms of faith, and exultingly exclaims, "My Lord and my God!" and the Saviour acknowledging the soul as ransomed by his blood, graciously responds, "Thy sins be forgiven thee!"

You perceive from what has been said, that the office of faith in our justification is simply to appropriate the blessings of the Redeemer's purchase; and hence it is to be considered merely as *an instrument*. The blessings of salvation are all the purchase of the Saviour's blood, and are offered without money and without price. Faith is the hand by which the soul receives these blessings. The poor man on whom you bestow your charity, never suspects that there is any merit in the act of holding out his hand to receive it: nor does the sinner any more dream

of merit in the act of stretching out the hand of faith, to receive those spiritual blessings which the Lord Jesus has treasured up for the supply of his people.

Methinks I hear some one say, "And is it so that faith is the only thing requisite for salvation: how is it then that, in other parts of the Bible, *good works* are so explicitly enjoined: how is it, especially, that the Saviour himself, who could not mistake in respect to the conditions of salvation, hath said, 'Ye are my friends, if ye *do* whatsoever I command you?'" In order to see the perfect consistency of these different passages with each other, we have only to refer to the gracious constitution of the gospel. By good works in scripture, are not meant works which are good merely in form, which appear to the eye of man to be good, while they are dictated by motives which God cannot approve; but such as are good in principle, which are the legitimate operation of sincere and sanctified affections. Good works, in this sense, are indeed essential to salvation, unless the believer dies before he has the opportunity of performing them; but then they are essential, not as constituting the ground, or any part of the ground, of a sinner's justification, but simply as the fruits and evidences of a living faith. They are as truly required by the gospel as faith itself; and even if they had not been *explicitly* required, the requisition of them would have been involved in the requisition of faith; for evangelical faith is the great principle of christian obedience. There may be that which pretends to be the faith of the gospel, which does not produce good works; but it will be found, in the end, to have been no better than the faith of devils.

You may inquire again, how the importance which I have here given to faith, consists with those passages in which *repentance*, *being born again*, &c. are mentioned as the conditions on which eternal life is bestowed. Here again, the answer is easy. Being born again is nothing less than having a renewed nature; and faith, repentance,

and all other christian graces, are only the legitimate exercises of that nature. Evangelical faith always includes godly sorrow for sin; and there is no such thing as genuine repentance, independently of a believing view of the great atonement. The christian character is made up of a variety of virtues and graces; and as no one of them exists independently of the rest, wherever one of them is enjoined, the rest are all implied. They may indeed exist with different degrees of strength, and some of them may be so feeble that they seem scarcely to exist at all; nevertheless, where a gracious principle has once been implanted, there is the embryo of a perfect character. Hence you perceive that, whether we exhort you to repent of your sins, or believe in Christ, or submit to God, or obtain a new heart, the direction is, in each case, substantially the same: and it is impossible that you should obey one of these injunctions, without at the same time obeying all the rest.

I have now endeavored to show you, my young friends, what you must do, to secure the salvation of your souls. Let me, in conclusion, direct your attention to two or three practical remarks.

1. And, first, the subject teaches you that *it is a most responsible office to direct and counsel the awakened sinner.* When the mind is wrought up to a high state of painful excitement, and is anxiously looking out for relief, it is likely to grasp with eagerness at any thing that is offered in the way of consolation; and if, at such a moment, an awakened sinner has a cup of poison put into his hands, there is great danger that he will drink down its contents, and suspect no danger, till he finds the blood freezing at his heart. One right direction, at that critical moment, is doubtless, often, in the hands of the divine Spirit, the means of bringing the sinner to a joyful acceptance of Christ's salvation; while, on the other hand, it admits of as little question, that one wrong counsel may be the means of carrying the soul away from the Saviour,

and entrenching it in some wretched, fatal delusion. You are a young christian; and some companion comes to you, to tell you confidentially that he is anxious for his soul, and to ask you what he shall do to secure its salvation. There is danger that his distress may work upon your natural sensibilities in such a way, that you may drop some expression that will lower his view of the evil of sin, or that will put him upon some other way of relief than that which is prescribed in the gospel. But rely on it, this is false compassion. If his impressions concerning his character and prospects were only the effect of a heated fancy, unquestionably it were an act of kindness to undeceive him, and to restore, if possible, the serenity of his mind, by convincing him of his mistake. But this is not the fact: so far from it, that the most vivid conceptions of his guilt which he is able to form, probably fall far below the actual reality. If your brother or sister were sick, would it be kindness in you to forbear administering a remedy which you knew would be efficacious, only because it might be disagreeable; and would you substitute one which you were certain could not avail, only because it might give momentary relief, and would not be attended with pain? If the dearest friend I have on earth were so bowed down under a sense of sin, as to be deprived even of that rest which nature requires; if his iniquities had taken hold upon him so that he could not even look up; though I would open my heart wide to his distresses, and would go and spread out his case before my God, and would embalm my supplication with tears, yet I should not dare to point him to any other refuge than the cross of Christ. I should not dare to press upon him any less important duty than repentance of sin, and faith in the atonement, and submission to God, his rightful Sovereign; and till he had done this, I should be obliged to say, however my heart might bleed for his anguish, that his convictions were not unreasonable. Yes, if I should point him to any other spot in the universe, than

the cross of Calvary, I should anticipate the time, when I should hear a reproving and reproaching voice from the world of despair, charging me with having been his destroyer!

2. In view of our subject, we see *how exactly accommodated are the terms of the gospel to the necessities of men.* Any scheme of salvation that was not entirely of grace, could never meet the exigencies of our condition. If the blessings of eternal life were to be bestowed only on the ground of human merit, where is the being on earth who could expect any other portion than that which the Bible awards to the reprobate? For where is the individual who has not, by violating the precept, exposed himself to the penalty, of God's law? But the scheme of mercy which the gospel proposes, contemplates man in all his guilt and ruin; it proffers to him a free forgiveness—a free salvation—and it demands only that he should accept it, without money and without price. Behold here both the wisdom and goodness of God—that he should have devised a scheme of redemption, in which the necessities of our condition are so happily contemplated! Here also behold an illustrious proof of the divinity of the gospel; for what man or angel could have formed a plan, in which so much grace shines forth to rebel man, and so much glory redounds to God in the highest?

Finally: *Happy is that youth who has believed in Christ to the saving of his soul!* For this principle of faith constitutes a delightful bond of union between the soul and its Saviour, which is the channel of the richest spiritual blessings, and which all the powers of darkness might labor in vain to dissolve. What though he may die in the morning of life? His faith will secure to him a part in the inheritance which Jesus has purchased for his people. What though he may be spared to the period of middle life or old age? His faith is a pledge that he will live for the benefit of his fellow men, and the glory of his

Redeemer. What though temptation may assail him in its varied forms, and affliction may aim at him its sharpest arrows? His faith will enable him to triumph over the one, and to rejoice in the other. What though he may sometimes be ready to sink under the burden of his own corruptions? Faith will be in him a principle not only of comfort, but sanctification, and will ensure to him a victory over these internal foes. How lovely will be his character, how useful his example in life; how peaceful his reflections, how bright his prospects in death; and how unutterably glorious his condition in eternity!

LECTURE XI.

EVIDENCE OF RELIGION.

MATTHEW VII. 21.

NOT EVERY ONE THAT SAITH UNTO ME, LORD, LORD, SHALL ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN; BUT HE THAT DOETH THE WILL OF MY FATHER WHICH IS IN HEAVEN.

It is the privilege of God's people, not only to have a principle of divine life implanted in their hearts, which is destined to prove the germ of immortal glory; but also to possess evidence themselves, and furnish evidence to others, that such is their happy condition. Every christian *may*, by a faithful inspection of his own heart, satisfy himself, on good grounds, that he is a disciple of Christ: Every christian *will*, by the general tenor of his conduct, evince the same fact to those who have an opportunity of witnessing his conversation and deportment.

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that, though the evidences of personal piety are within the reach of every individual, insomuch that no one need mistake in respect to his own character, there is great danger that erroneous judgments will actually be formed; and that persons, by the adoption of false standards, will fatally deceive themselves on the great point of their acceptance with God. And while this is true, in a degree, of all, it is especially true of the young; and that, for reasons which are so obvious, that I need not stop here to specify

them. It is the design of this discourse, my young friends, to guard you against mistake on this momentous point—to prevent you, on the one hand, from resting satisfied with insufficient evidence of christian character; and to save you, on the other, from needless anxiety and distress, through a misapprehension of the kind or degree of evidence with which you ought to be satisfied.

The words of our text, as they stand connected with our Lord's discourse, are designed primarily to aid us in forming a judgment of each other: but if I mistake not, they may also be legitimately used to assist us in forming a judgment of ourselves. Both these objects will be kept in view, while I endeavor to present before you, first, what ARE NOT, and secondly, what ARE, evidences of christian character.

I. I am, first, to notice several things which, taken by themselves, or taken together, furnish NO sufficient evidence of christian character. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven."

1. Under this article, I observe, first, that there is no judgment to be formed on this subject, *from any character which one's conviction of sin may assume.* Nothing is more common than for persons, in speaking of the hopeful piety of others, to dwell with great emphasis upon the fact that they have been the subjects of peculiarly deep and pungent convictions; and no doubt too that many, in estimating their own claims to the christian character, for want of better evidence, go back to the same period, and think over the remorse, and terror, and agitation, which they then felt; and very charitably, alas, too charitably for themselves, conclude, that in all this there must have been laid the foundation of a thorough conversion to God. True it is indeed, as you have heard, that there is no repentance which is not preceded by conviction; but it is far from being true that there is no conviction which is

not followed by repentance. Even the most pungent conviction that was ever felt on this side of the world of wo, involves not the least necessity in the nature of the case, or the least certainty in fact, of the subsequent renovation of the heart. And in accordance with this statement, who that has been conversant with subjects of this kind, has not witnessed instances in which the most deep and awful impressions of the wrath of God, have manifestly given place to a habit of carelessness; and the soul that seemed to be stricken by the terrors of the judgment, has, in a little while, fallen back into the current of worldly levities; and not a vestige of anxiety, or even of seriousness, has remained. Venture not then, my young friends, for a moment, to believe that you have experienced the *renewing* influences of the Spirit, merely from the fact that you have experienced his *awakening* influences, even though his disclosures may have filled you with agony. That you may ascertain your condition in the sight of God, it is right indeed that you should inquire, whether you have ever seen your true character as a guilty and ruined sinner: but if this be the only inquiry that you make, and you rest satisfied here, you are inevitably deceived, and there is every probability that you are undone. The reprobate in the world of despair are the subjects of far more pungent conviction than was ever felt by mortals on earth; but the spirit which reigns in their hearts would, if it were armed with power, wrest from the Almighty his sceptre, and spread desolation through the universe. Is it not presumption, is it not madness, to believe yourself regenerated, on no better evidence than that which the fiends of darkness have, and have had, for ages?

2. There is nothing in *the peculiar manner of the Spirit's operation at the time of a supposed conversion*, by which it can be decided with certainty whether the change be genuine. It is well known that there is a great diversity in the manner in which the Holy Spirit operates to bring sinners into the kingdom: sometimes the

change is gradual, and the subject of it can only say, in comparing his exercises at different periods, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see;" whereas, in other cases, the Saviour reveals himself suddenly to the soul in all his grace and glory, and fills it with joy unspeakable. Now, as these different states of mind actually exist in connexion with a genuine conversion, so each has its counterfeits; and neither the one nor the other can be safely relied on as evidence of evangelical faith. I can point you to instances in which individuals, who have seemed to come silently and tremblingly into the kingdom, and have expressed the utmost distrust of their own hearts, have, after all, fallen back, and openly deserted the cause of Christ: and I can point you to instances still more numerous, in which the strongest professions of humility, and faith, and joy, and deadness to the world, at the time of a supposed conversion, have been followed, and speedily followed, by an entire disregard, and sometimes an absolute contempt, of spiritual religion. Here again, then, my young friends, be on your guard against self-deception. Are you professedly a disciple of Christ, and yet are you living in criminal conformity to the world? And though you are conscious that there is nothing, at present, either in the exercises of your heart, or the conduct of your life, to yield any evidence of a spiritual renovation, are you nevertheless recurring in your thoughts to the peace, and love, and rapture, of other days, as evidence that a principle of divine life has been implanted in your soul? Believe me, all that peace, and love, and rapture, may have been delusion; and your present condition renders it more than probable that it was so. Yes, what you once thought was the evidence of piety, and what you still cling to as such, may be only the result of an attempt of the grand adversary, to blindfold you in respect to your danger, that he may the more easily lead you down to perdition.

3. *The most diligent performance of external duties*, is not to be relied on as evidence of a renewed heart. You may be a regular and respectful attendant at the sanctuary, as often as the doors of the sanctuary are open. You may devote part of every day to the reading of the Bible, and may feel an interest in gaining a knowledge of its blessed truths. You may often be found in the private religious circle, and may be the instrument of edifying and comforting others, by the part you take in its exercises. You may, in a full belief of the truths of the gospel, join yourself to the number of God's people, and come to the holy ordinance of the supper, thus rendering an external obedience to your Saviour's dying command. You may even go farther than this, and may enter your closet statedly and frequently, and may fall down upon your knees, and may take the language of prayer upon your lips; and in all this you may be conscientious, and may actually suppose yourself devout; and yet after all, the spirit of true piety may never have found a place in your heart. It may all be the working of a spirit of self-righteousness—a spirit which is seeking to secure the divine favor by means which have never received the divine sanction; which would substitute, as the price of salvation, human merit for the merit of the Redeemer's blood. I do not say that, in all this, there may not be that which may seem to indicate to the surrounding world the existence of a principle of religion; but I do say that this, and more than this, may exist, while the heart has never experienced a moral renovation, and while, of course, the individual can have no evidence of having experienced it.

4. I observe, once more, that *no degree of zeal in respect to the great objects and interests of religion*, furnishes decisive evidence of christian character. You may not only do all, and be all, that I have supposed under the preceding article—that is, you may not only discharge the various external duties belonging to a christian profession, with diligence and punctuality—but you may

manifest a degree of interest in respect to the advancement of the kingdom of Christ, which may procure for you the reputation of a devoted christian, and which may seem to cast into the shade the apparently more sluggish efforts of some who have really been born of the Spirit. You may talk much of your own inward experience, of the trials and conflicts, the joys and triumphs of the christian life; and may imagine yourself the subject of raptures which seem to you like the beginning of heavenly glory; you may wonder at the apparent heartlessness of other professors, and even doubt the genuineness of their religion, because their feelings do not rise so high as your own: You may deplore the deep moral lethargy of the surrounding world, and may sound the note of alarm in the ear of every careless sinner whom you meet: You may even set up as a reformer, and astonish the world by wild and startling theories of faith and duty, and exhibit a deportment which, to the surrounding world, shall seem to say, "Stand by, I am holier than thou:" Yes, and you may be foremost on the list of those who are willing to contribute their time, and substance, and influence, to the advancement of the kingdom of Christ, and may seem to evince a spirit of self-denial which would not shrink from martyrdom:—All this you may be and do, and yet after all, you may be an utter stranger to the influence of genuine religion. For in all these labors and sacrifices, the secret feeling of your heart may be that you are drawing upon you the approving eye of God, and laying up for yourself treasures of bliss to be realized in eternity. And with this feeling there may be a spirit of pride, which exults in a comparison of your own character with that of others; and which, strange as it may seem, subsists, in no small degree, upon your fancied self-abasement. Here again, you may deceive the world; but if you deceive yourself, it is only because you neglect to ascertain the real state of your heart, or because you neglect to compare it with the Bible standard of christian experience.

So far then you may go, and not be a christian. You may have pungent convictions, and glowing raptures; you may be punctual in the performance of external duty, and zealous for the advancement of the cause of Christ; and yet, after all, you may have no sufficient evidence that you have been born of the Spirit. So far your experience may reach, and yet it may be nothing more than saying, "Lord, Lord."

II. In what then DOES consist the true evidence of christian character? We have the answer to this inquiry in the concluding part of our text: "But he that doeth the will of my Father, which is in heaven." This is the second division of our discourse.

The grand test of christian character, then, is *obedience to the will of God.*

It is not *perfect* obedience; for no mere man since the fall has ever perfectly kept the commandments of God. The Bible has declared that "all have gone out of the way;" that "there is none that doeth good, and sinneth not." The condition on which salvation was originally offered, was perfect obedience; and if man had yielded such obedience, he might have claimed eternal life, on the ground of law, as his reward. But the gospel contemplates him as a sinner; and the conditions on which it offers salvation, are accommodated to his character as a sinner; and while it continues the law as a rule of life, and supposes a disposition in the christian to obey the law, it nevertheless makes provision for the forgiveness not only of past sins, but of those also which flow from his partially sanctified nature. The gospel, like the law, demands of the sinner that he should do the whole will of God; but, unlike the law, it provides for the acceptance of an imperfect obedience.

What then is the *nature* of that obedience, which is to be regarded as a test of christian character?

It is the obedience of the *life*, and the obedience of the *heart*.

It is the obedience of the *life;* by which I mean, the habitual discharge of all external duties.

There are those who lay great stress upon the duties which they owe to *man*, who yet find it an easy matter to compromise with conscience for those which they owe to *God*. In their domestic relations, as parents or children, husbands or wives, brothers or sisters, they are in many respects most exemplary; and are always on the alert to minister to each other's happiness. In civil society, they are active and public spirited, and are ready to lend a helping hand to the various institutions which promise to meliorate the condition of man. They are moreover generous and humane, and will never turn a deaf ear to the cry of distress, and will even go and search out objects of want and suffering, that they may administer relief. But on the other hand, they will think it a light matter to suffer their seats to be vacant in the house of God, and will regard the Bible as little more than a piece of antiquated furniture, and will hardly suspend their secular employments on the sabbath; and as for the duty of private prayer, or confessing Christ before men, they never even think of performing it. They are good neighbors, and good friends, and good citizens; but here you must stop, unless you go on to say that "God is not in all their thoughts."

There is another class—just the opposite of this—who perform with pharisaical exactness the external duties which they owe to *God*, while those which belong to their *social relations*, are but little regarded. They make conscience of being in the house of God at least twice every sabbath, and oftener if they have opportunity; they publicly profess their faith in Christ, and unite with his people in commemorating his death; they come regularly to every prayer-meeting, and never shrink from taking part in its services; they go, at least every morning and evening, into their closets for prayer, and in their daily intercourse always seem ready to admonish

the careless sinner or the sluggish christian, or to put forth an effort, in any way, for a revival of religion. And yet, after all, when you hear the testimony of their poor or sick neighbors respecting them, it may be that they have said to them, "Be ye warmed, and be ye clothed, depart in peace:" or if it has occurred to you to look a little more closely into their characters, and to inquire of those who have had dealings with them in the world, what testimony they have to render concerning them, possibly they may tell you significantly, that though they have heard that they were very good in a prayer, they have found them to be very hard in a bargain; and it may be even that common report has superseded the necessity of all inquiry; and that they have an established character in the world, for being not only unmerciful but unjust. If you should see them in the church or the lecture room, you might put them down on the list of those of whom the world is not worthy; but if you should see them in the counting-room, or the exchange, you would put them down on the list of those with whom you would wish to have as little to do as possible.

Now, my young friends, I hardly need say that the obedience of the christian life *differs* essentially from both these, while yet it has something *in common* with each of them. The true christian will not make the performance of one set of duties an apology for the neglect of another; but he will endeavor faithfully to perform them all. It will be equally a matter of conscience with him to perform the duties which he owes to God and to man; for he will recollect that both are enjoined by the same authority. The true christian is a christian in the closet, a christian in the family, a christian in the church, and a christian in the world; and he who habitually neglects the duties which devolve upon him in any of his relations, has no reason to regard himself a christian.

In the obedience of the christian life, there is no exception to be made for the *most difficult and self-denying duties*. There are those who are willing to render an external obedience to God's commandments, when he commands nothing that involves much self-denial, who nevertheless are not willing to follow Christ, at the expense of taking up the cross. Let the command be to attend church on the sabbath, or to distribute of your property to the necessities of the poor, or to discharge any other of the common duties of the christian life, and you will yield perhaps a prompt and cheerful compliance. But change the case, and suppose the path of duty to become a thorny path—suppose something be required of you which is like plucking out the right eye, or cutting off the right hand—suppose a beloved Isaac is to be led out, and led out by your own hand, for sacrifice—why then perhaps you will begin to hesitate, and reason, and murmur, and the result of the whole may be, that you will make some kind of compromise with conscience for the neglect of your duty. Christian obedience, on the contrary, knows nothing of this compromising temper: there is in it a spirit of courage and inflexibility, which never agitates but this single question, 'What does God require of me?' and that being settled, nothing remains but action; no matter whether his path be strewed with flowers, or whether it be illumined by the fires of the martyr's stake.

Moreover, the obedience of the christian life, is a *persevering* obedience. You see many who begin well, but their obedience does not hold out. For a while, they seem disposed faithfully to discharge the whole circle of christian duties; but at length they find an apology for the neglect of one, and then of another, and another, until their obedience becomes so defective, that no one can mistake it for the evidence of piety. The true christian, on the other hand, though he may have his seasons of declension, perseveres, and on the whole, be-

comes more and more faithful in the discharge of duty. "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

It is proper here to remark that, in estimating the christian character of our fellow-men, there is some regard to be had to *the variety of constitutional temperament*. Some, from their original constitution, are more inclined to perform one set of duties than another; and with all the counteracting influences both of conscience and principle, it will be strange if this original bias does not, more or less frequently, discover itself. Of two individuals possessing on the whole an equal amount of piety, one may excel most in some of the christian graces, another in some others; while each may exhibit his peculiar corresponding deficiencies. It were rash, therefore, to question the piety of any one, who claims to be considered a christian, without having regard to his peculiar temperament; though no peculiarity of temperament must be allowed to set aside the evidence against him, that results from the habitual neglect of any known duty, or the habitual indulgence of any known sin.

Such is the obedience of the christian life. It has respect to all God's commandments, even those which require the most difficult duties; and it is persevering and progressive. And this, let me say, constitutes all the evidence of christian character that we can furnish to the world. But in judging ourselves, we are to go farther, and inquire whether, with the obedience of the life, is also associated that of the *heart;* whether with the outward act, which is open to the observation of man, there is the inward principle to command the approbation of God. You perceive then that by the obedience of the heart, I mean nothing more nor less than *the spirit which prompts to the obedience of the life.*

The obedience of the heart implies two things:

1. *An utter renunciation of every claim to personal merit.* There is nothing more natural to man, than a

spirit of self-righteousness. Though he has no disposition to yield obedience to the law, he is more than willing to be saved by it; and hence it not unfrequently happens that, when persons who are flagrantly immoral, are interrogated in respect to their hope of future happiness, they instantly recur to something they have done, or it may be to something they have not done, as constituting its foundation. But such a spirit does not, cannot reign in the breast of the true christian; for in the act of becoming a christian, he has gained a settled conviction that there is no merit in his best services, and that after he has done all, he is an unprofitable servant. While, therefore, he engages in the faithful discharge of all external duties, while he doeth what his hand findeth to do with his might; he realizes that it is by help obtained from above that he is able to do any thing; and though indeed he expects a reward, yet he expects it, not as a matter of debt, but of grace. And the more abasing his views of himself, the more cordial his confidence in the merit of the Saviour's blood, so much the more elevated are his hopes, so much the brighter the evidence that his heart has been brought under the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost.

2. The obedience of the heart also implies *an ultimate regard to the authority and glory of God.*

The unrenewed man may perform acts externally good, as truly as the christian: he may perform them from a regard to his reputation, or from a spirit of self-righteousness, or from constitutionally noble and benevolent feelings; but the christian performs them *because God has required them*, and he delights to obey his requisitions. He regards God not merely as a righteous lawgiver, but as a most gracious and compassionate Father; and like a good child, he not only acknowledges but reverences his authority.

But the christian, in his obedience, has respect to the *glory*, as well as the authority, of God. The ruling de-

sire of his heart is, that God may be glorified; and he knows that he can glorify him only by reflecting his image, or what is the same thing, by doing his will. Hence when he puts forth his hand to any benevolent work, or when he has the pleasure of seeing it accomplished, or indeed when he performs the most common duties of the christian life, the language of his heart is, "Not unto myself, but to thy name, O Lord, be all the glory!" God is especially glorified, when the redemption of the gospel takes effect in the hearts of men; because in that work the attributes of his character are most signally illustrated. Hence the christian not only delights to open his own heart to the influence of evangelical truth, but to procure for the same truth a lodgement in the hearts of others—in other words, to make men wise unto salvation. In a word, agreeably to the exhortation of the apostle, whatever he does, he does it "heartily, as to the Lord, and not to men."

Such is the obedience of the heart—that on which you are especially to rely, in estimating your claim to the character of a christian. I will now conclude with two brief remarks.

1. The subject shows us *the importance of being cautious in respect to the judgments we form of christian character, both in regard to ourselves and others.* We have seen that there is a strong tendency among men, to set up false standards on this subject; and instead of referring character to the only scriptural test, to refer it to some arbitrary test, which the Bible has not even seemed to sanction. For instance, you have a friend who has been the subject of pungent convictions, and then again the subject of glowing raptures; and you speak to that friend, and of him, as if you were absolutely certain that he had been renewed. You may indeed have reason to hope that that is the case; and there may be that in his general appearance, for which you may, with good reason, give God thanks: but from the nature of the case,

you can never at that period *know* that he is a christian ; because you cannot search the heart ; and because multitudes have, for a season, appeared, in all respects, as promising as he, who have afterwards shown themselves among the open enemies of the cross. Now, believe me, you will be likely to render a much better service to that individual, by impressing him with the danger of self-deception, and of the importance of self-examination, and of giving all diligence to make his calling and election sure, than by inspiring him with a spirit of self-confidence : for if he be a christian, the former course certainly will do him no harm : if he be not a christian, the latter course may serve effectually to seal his perdition. Or it may be that the case is your own—that you are the very person who is rejoicing in the hope of having felt the power of God's grace. My young friend, I rejoice with you ; but it is right that both you and I should rejoice with trembling. The act of regeneration is indeed instantaneous ; but not so the evidence of it—that is to be collected by a diligent and long continued inspection of your heart and life. Beware then how you indulge a hope too soon, or too confidently. Beware how you satisfy yourself with any evidence which is nothing more than calling Christ, " Lord, Lord."

Finally : let the subject *lead you to diligent self examination.* You indulge a hope that you have been renewed by the Spirit of God. Answer then to your conscience the following questions. " Am I endeavoring faithfully to discharge my whole duty ? In the family and in the world, in the closet and in the church, to God and to man, in all my relations and conditions, is it my grand object not only to know, but to do, what the Lord requires of me ? In the obedience which I render to the commandments of God, do I make any exception in favor of those duties which involve severe self-denial ; or do I as readily perform those as any other ? Do I perform external duties with a self-righteous spirit, or with

a spirit of self-abasement, and humble dependance on God's grace ; with a disposition to arrogate the glory to myself, or to give all the glory to God ? And is the spirit of obedience gaining strength in my heart ; am I more and more determined that nothing shall drive me from the post of duty ; and that come what will, I will ever be found on the Lord's side ?" If such is the character of your obedience, no doubt it is the operation of a principle of living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But I beseech you, be not satisfied with any evidence that you are a christian less decisive than this : if you trust to mere conviction, or mere rapture, or mere past experience of any kind, without respect to the present, there is every reason to believe that you will be deceived. But if you have the evidence of present, sincere, persevering obedience, it is the best evidence—the only sufficient evidence, that you can possess. Wherefore, my young friends, let me leave you for the present, with the exhortation of the apostle—" Add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

LECTURE XII.

PROFESSION OF RELIGION.

ISAIAH XLIV. 5.

ONE SHALL SAY, I AM THE LORD'S; AND ANOTHER SHALL CALL HIMSELF BY THE NAME OF JACOB; AND ANOTHER SHALL SUBSCRIBE WITH HIS HAND UNTO THE LORD, AND SURNAME HIMSELF BY THE NAME OF ISRAEL.

In this and several preceding chapters, the prophet is describing the blessings which the Jews might expect on their return from captivity; though his description clearly looks forward to the still richer blessings which the church should enjoy under the gospel dispensation. These blessings are all included in a plentiful effusion of the Holy Spirit; especially upon the young. "I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass; as willows by the water courses." The consequence of this signal effusion of divine influence is described in our text—"One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel"—*i. e.* the youth who should be converted, would enter into a covenant with God by making a public profession of religion.

As the preceding discourse was intended to exhibit before you the evidence of christian character, thus as-

sisting you to decide whether a principle of religion has been implanted in your hearts ; the topic which the text suggests—that of a PUBLIC PROFESSION OF RELIGION—seems naturally to follow next in order. I shall, therefore, in the present discourse, call your attention to the *nature* of a christian profession ; to the *qualifications* requisite for it ; and to some considerations illustrative of its *importance*.

As to the *nature* of a christian profession,

1. I observe, first, that it includes *an acknowledgment of the divine authority and doctrines of the gospel.*

It implies a recognition of the fact that *the Bible is the word of God ;* that whatever that contains, being the product of divine inspiration, is true. So much as this is necessary to constitute the church of Christ a community distinct from that of Pagans, or Jews, or Mahommedans. Of course, whoever joins this community, must be, in the broad sense, a believer in Revelation.

But this is not all. There is implied in a christian profession, not only a recognition of the fact that God has given a revelation to the world, and that that revelation is contained in the Bible, but also an assent to the great *doctrines* of which it is composed I say the *great* doctrines ; and by these I mean those truths which enter essentially into the nature of christianity, and which cannot be separated from it but that it will have entirely lost its beauty and power. Each particular church has, no doubt, a right to decide for herself what doctrines shall constitute the basis of her union ; but so long as she holds the head, that is, so long as she acknowledges Christ in the scriptural sense, as the foundation, she has a claim to be considered as a branch, and her members as members, of the true church. But the moment she abandons the fundamental truths of christianity, though she may retain her character as a distinct society, she loses it as a branch of the church of Christ. She may yet be a city set on

an hill; but the light which is in her, and which she diffuses around her, is darkness.

But you inquire, perhaps, *whether this matter of creeds is not a thing of human invention;* inasmuch as Jesus himself sanctioned the confession of Peter, which was simply an acknowledgment of his Messiahship—"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." I answer, this declaration of Peter is an *epitome* of the whole gospel. Our Lord, in approving this expression of Peter's faith, took for granted that the truths which this proposition involves were also received; and what is there that is essential in christianity, let me ask, that is not involved in it? Do *you* believe in the simple proposition that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God? Then, if you are consistent, you believe that he is "God manifest in the flesh;" that he came to redeem the world; and hence that the world is in a state of ruin. You believe all that he has said of himself, and all that the Holy Ghost has said of him—of his character, his errand from heaven, and the means by which it is accomplished; and this includes the whole of christianity. Admit, if you will, that Peter might not have meant so much as this, inasmuch as his views respecting the Messiah's kingdom were still crude and imperfect; nevertheless, Peter is here to be considered as the organ of the Holy Ghost, and as uttering a declaration in behalf of the church, the full meaning of which, when the mists of Jewish prejudice had passed away, the church would be able to understand. And so the result has proved—this declaration has always been regarded by the church, as embodying all the grand peculiarities of christianity.

But the supposition that a simple assent to the Messiahship of Jesus, or to the authority of revelation, were all that is implied in a profession of christianity, *involves an absurdity.* For in making such a profession, you surely declare your belief in the christian religion. What then is the christian religion? Is it merely the fact that

God has given to the world a revelation, and that that revelation is contained in the Bible? Or is it not rather the truths or doctrines which the Bible contains? None can doubt that it is the latter. Most certainly, then, an acknowledgment of these truths or doctrines enters essentially into the nature of a christian profession.

2. A profession of religion further implies *an act of solemn self-dedication to God.* There is a public recognition of christian obligations—the doing of an outward act, expressive of the inward feeling of the soul—a feeling that you are not your own—that every faculty, and affection, and talent you possess, belongs to God, and is to be consecrated to his service and glory. At the moment you were born into the kingdom, you gave yourself away to God in an everlasting covenant; you gave up your heart to him; and he graciously accepted the offering, and wrote your name in the book of life; and he received you as an adopted child. This solemn transaction is distinctly recognized in the presence of the world: You publicly acknowledge God the Father, to be your Father; Jesus Christ, your Redeemer and Master; and the Holy Spirit, your Sanctifier; and you promise, in reliance on God's grace, that you will render that gratitude and obedience which become a redeemed sinner, and an adopted child. You recognize the great fact that, inasmuch as you are bought with a price, you are not your own, but are bound to glorify God both in your body and spirit. Henceforth, wherever you may be, or in whatever circumstances your lot may be cast, you engage to live the life of a christian. No matter though you should be cut off from christian privileges, or surrounded by powerful temptations, or even have the alternative placed before you of turning your back on your Master, or of dying in his cause, you have solemnly pledged yourself to God, and have done it in the face of earth and heaven, that to your latest hour, and latest moment, you will be a soldier of the cross. The vows of God are upon you, and though

you may forget them, though you may even trifle with them, you can never cast them off. They will accompany you to the judgment, and will contribute there to heighten your joy, or deepen your agony.

3. A profession of religion, moreover, involves *a pledge to the church, and especially to the particular branch of it to which you join yourself, that you will be a fellow-helper with them unto the kingdom of God.* You engage to walk with them in the ordinances of the Lord, especially in that holy ordinance that commemorates your Redeemer's death. You engage to promote, by every means in your power, their comfort and usefulness. You promise to do this by the general spirituality of your example; by letting your light shine in all your intercourse with them; by stirring them up to every good work; by kindly admonishing them of their errors; and by lifting up the hands that hang down. You pledge yourself, at the same time, kindly to accept all their endeavors for your own edification; and especially to receive with meekness the fraternal reproof, even though you should be conscious that your motives or your conduct had been misapprehended. In a word, you engage to keep the best interests of your fellow-christians always in view; to walk together with them, so far as you can, in the love of God, and in the comforts of the Holy Ghost: thus assisting them to abound more and more in the virtues, and graces, and consolations of the gospel.

Once more: A profession of religion implies *a virtual declaration to the world, that you are determined henceforth to be on the Lord's side.* Not that in consequence of becoming a professor, you are to withdraw from the world, and decline all intercourse with it—that would be to run away from the field of your duty;—but you are to break off all sinful connexion with it. Perhaps you have been immersed in its pleasures, and have cared for nothing but a round of amusement; or perhaps you have thought lightly, or spoken lightly of serious, vital religion: it may

be, that you have been associated with others in open opposition to the cause of Christ, and that you have encouraged them, while you have been encouraged by them, in treating the salvation of the soul as if it were nothing more than a dream or a shadow. But in making a christian profession, you proclaim to the world that you have done with all your contempt and neglect of religion; that they must no longer look for you in scenes of levity; that you are determined to brave the shame and scandal of the cross, and to stand forth resolutely and perseveringly on the side of duty and of God. What though worldly friendship may be offended, and may plead with you to relax a little from the strictness of your religion; what though worldly convenience must be sacrificed, and difficulties unexpected and appalling encountered in the cause of Christ; in making a christian profession, you virtually tell the world that all this is nothing to you; that in the strength of God's grace, you are determined to disregard alike both its frowns and its smiles, and to follow your master fearlessly whithersoever he may conduct you. I stop not now to inquire how far the lives of most professed christians correspond with such a declaration; but that this is the simple language of the act by which you confess Christ before men, surely does not admit of question.

II. Our second inquiry, to which we now proceed, respects the *qualifications* for a christian profession.

And here I remark, in the first place, that *mere orthodoxy*, or a speculative belief of the truths of the Bible, does *not* qualify a person for making such a profession. This indeed, as we have already seen, enters essentially into its nature; but that it is not the only thing requisite, is proved by the view which we have already taken of what such a profession implies. You cannot, in the scriptural sense, confess Christ before men, unless you firmly believe the doctrines which he taught: but these

doctrines you may believe, no matter how firmly, and if this is all, you cannot come worthily to the table of the Lord.

Nor yet, again, does *mere external morality* constitute the grand qualification for making a profession. True it is indeed that a worthy communicant will be, must be, a moral man; but not every moral man is a worthy communicant. Christian communion, in its very nature, implies an exercise of the heart—of pious and devout affections. But a man may be externally moral, insomuch that you can say nothing of his outward deportment that is not good, and yet not a gracious affection may ever have been kindled in his breast: of course he cannot be qualified either to discharge the duties, or to enjoy the privileges of a christian profession.

What then *are* the requisite qualifications for making a public profession of religion?

I answer, first, *a suitable degree of religious knowledge*. The truths of the gospel are the elements of all evangelical piety; so that some knowledge of these truths is absolutely essential to christian character. But the knowledge to which I here refer, relates especially to the nature and design of the ordinance of the supper, to which, in virtue of their profession, christians are admitted. In order to an intelligent participation of this christian festival, which constitutes the visible badge of discipleship, they must have some knowledge of its connexion with the redemption of the world; of the various lessons of humility, and gratitude, and obedience, which it is designed to teach; and of the different channels of spiritual light and comfort which it opens to the heart. Many a professed christian, from not being properly enlightened on this subject, and from looking for some unaccountable and almost magical effect to be produced upon his feelings, rather than for the natural operation of pious affections in view of truth rendered more vivid by sensible signs, has been sadly disappointed in his experience at the Lord's table;

and instead of going away with his spiritual strength renewed, has gone away with his mind clouded with spiritual gloom. It is manifest then that no person who has not knowledge to discern the Lord's body in the holy communion, is qualified to make a christian profession.

But while there must be knowledge to discern the Lord's body, there must also be faith to feed upon it: hence another, and the grand qualification for making a profession of religion, is *true piety*. That this is an indispensable requisite, results from the very nature of such a profession; for the person who makes it, hereby professedly gives himself away to God in an everlasting covenant; which he can never truly do without a renewed heart. And then again, the holy ordinance of the supper, to which he is admitted, is evidently designed for real christians; for who but the christian is qualified to engage in the celebration of it as a spiritual exercise, or to enjoy the consolations, or receive the benefits, which it proffers? Accordingly we find that the members of the churches which were established by the apostles, are addressed in their epistles as *saints*, or those who had been sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

So far is plain. But you will inquire, *what amount of evidence* you are to gain that you *are* a christian, before you join yourself to the church. Are you to wait for an absolute assurance? Undoubtedly not: for upon this principle the church could scarcely have an existence; as there are comparatively few, who, in the course of their lives, attain an undoubting assurance, on scriptural principles, that they have been renewed by the Holy Spirit; and in no ordinary case at least, does such assurance constitute any part of the character of a new convert. No rule exists, therefore, for the direction of your conduct, but the commanding probability: hence you should wait for nothing but a rational and preponderating persuasion of your own piety; a persuasion which is the result of faithful self-examination, prayer, and a diligent use of all the

means within your reach, of ascertaining your true character. But do you say that you dare not make a profession without an assurance that you have been renewed, as such a profession would be sin? I answer, how dare you neglect making a profession, when God has solemnly required it at your hands, and of course the neglect is sin? In the latter case, that is, in neglecting to make a profession, you *know* that you do wrong: in the former case, that is, in making a profession without having attained a certainty that you have been regenerated, you *do not* know that you do wrong; on the contrary, you are furnished by this rational persuasion of your piety, with a commanding probability that you are doing right, and that your profession will be sincere and acceptable to God. "Examine yourselves," said the apostle to the Corinthian church, "whether ye be in the faith;" clearly implying that, though they were the professed followers of Christ, yet they did not, even then, know themselves to be christians.

III. I am now, thirdly, to illustrate the *importance* of making a profession of religion.

1. It is important, first, as a matter of *consistency*. You indulge the hope that you have been renewed in the temper of your mind; that you have really given yourself to God in an everlasting covenant; and you are secretly determined that you will crucify the world, and cultivate all holy affections, and live as becometh an expectant of the glories of heaven. Are such the inward exercises of your soul—such your desires and intentions? Then where is the consistency of remaining in the ranks of those whose views and feelings are all of an opposite character; of cherishing an attachment to Christ, and yet refusing to profess such an attachment? It is the very nature of true piety, to be open and honest; but does it consist with honesty before God, to believe in your heart that you are a christian, and yet by making

no profession of religion, virtually to declare in your life, that you do *not* believe yourself a christian. Far be it from me to say, or to believe, that a person may not possess a regenerated nature, who never confesses Christ before the world: but if he be a christian, he is certainly an inconsistent one: his conduct, in this particular, is inconsistent with his hopes, and inconsistent with his general character.

2. A profession of religion is important as a matter of *influence*. Let a person live, in other respects, a christian life, and I do not say that his example will not be useful; but I do say that it will be far less so, than if he were publicly to recognize his christian obligations. For, in the first place, the fact that he is sensible that this inconsistency mars his character, will be likely to fetter him, in a degree, in his *exertions* to do good. And then again, how obviously must the fact of his not being a professor greatly diminish the *influence* of the exertions which he actually makes. Suppose he were to undertake to reprove a backsliding professor; or suppose he should attempt to direct the attention of a careless sinner to the concerns of his soul; how obvious is it that, in either case, the question would instantly come up, "Why attempt to enlist me in the service of a Master, of whom you practically declare that you are yourself ashamed? If religion be so important, why do you not proclaim your attachment to it, by publicly declaring yourself on the Lord's side?" But suppose, on the other hand, a christian does confess Christ before men, how much weight and authority does this circumstance impart to his whole example and character! When he reproves carelessness and irreligion, whether in the professed friends or the open enemies of Christ, they feel that he is acting in his true character; that he is discharging his christian obligations; and this will give him a powerful influence both with their understandings and consciences. Indeed, place him in whatever cir-

cumstances you will, and supposing him to be exemplary in his life, he will do his duty the more fearlessly, and the more effectually, from the fact that he is a professor.

3. A profession of religion is important as a matter of *christian improvement*. Young christians, especially, from being surrounded with peculiar temptations, need all the helps to a religious life they can obtain. They are especially in danger from the influence of former careless associates, who are apt to take the alarm, when they see them setting their faces towards heaven; and often do their utmost to retain them in their own ranks. And if they remain out of the church, these careless associates assail them with peculiar advantage: they are encouraged to greater boldness in their attacks; and their attacks are resisted, if resisted at all, with proportionably greater difficulty. And hence it has happened, that many young persons, who, for a season, promised well, from having delayed to confess Christ before men, have grown neglectful of duty, and have lost at once the evidences and the comforts of a good hope. But a profession is not only important as a means of preventing decline, but of promoting the growth of gracious principles and affections. It secures, on a larger scale, the privilege of christian intercourse—of being counselled, admonished, and strengthened, by fellow-heirs of the grace of life;—and especially it secures the privilege of joining in the commemoration of the Redeemer's death, which is fitted, above almost any thing else, to revive the graces, to establish the hopes, and to advance the comfort of the christian. Indeed, a profession of religion naturally brings the christian out of the atmosphere of the world, into the atmosphere of piety; it furnishes him, in many respects, with new facilities for doing his duty; and he who is sluggish and unfruitful in such circumstances, has indeed good reason to believe that his profession is an empty name.

4. I observe, once more, that a profession of religion is important as a matter of *obedience to the command of Christ*. The passages in which this duty is either directly enjoined, or clearly implied, are very numerous. All those passages in which christians are exhorted to come out from the world—not to be conformed to the world—to let their light shine before men, &c., are directly to this point: and the Saviour himself has declared in the most solemn manner—"Whosoever is ashamed of me and of my words—of him will the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." And again, in the institution of the supper, he says, "This do in remembrance of me;" and this institution, as we are elsewhere informed, was designed to be perpetuated till his second coming: of course, the obligation to celebrate it is binding upon all his disciples, in all ages. You see then, my young friends, that it is not a matter of choice with you, whether to make a profession of religion or not; other than it is a matter of choice with you, whether you will obey a plain command of Christ or not. Do you say, or do you secretly cherish the thought, that you will obey all his commands except this? Ah, you are deceived in indulging such an imagination; for if you are willing to make a single exception, if you are not ready to follow the Lord fully, you need no other evidence that you are a stranger to the power of his grace. "If any man will be my disciple," says the Master, "let him deny himself, and take up the cross"—every cross—"and follow me;" and if you decline making a profession, because you regard it an unimportant matter, and think you may as well go to heaven without it, wo be to that hope which has found a lodgement in your bosom!

Two or three brief inferences will conclude this discourse.

1. We are taught by this subject, that *a profession of religion should not be made, without great seriousness and*

deliberation. You have seen that it is a most solemn and deeply interesting transaction; a transaction which takes deeper hold of the realities of eternity, than any other in which it is possible that you should engage; a transaction which identifies your character, in a degree, with the credit of religion; and which, if heartlessly performed, involves you in the fearful guilt of mocking God. Moreover, there is great danger that you will deceive yourself in respect to your own qualifications for making a profession;—that you will mistake a transient excitement of feeling, for a genuine conversion to God; and that, after having entered the church, you will discover the melancholy secret, that you have never felt the power of divine grace; and that the church will discover that, in receiving you to her communion, she has taken into her bosom a formalist or a traitor. Take heed, then, my young friend, that, in making a christian profession, you act with due deliberation; and give yourself suitable time to investigate and ascertain your qualifications. Take heed that your self-examination be conducted with humble and fervent prayer, that you may be delivered from self-deception, and may be guided by the Holy Spirit to a true estimate of your character. And when you actually approach this duty, do it with something of the solemnity which you would feel, if you were standing before the judgment seat of Christ: approach it with an awful sense of the responsibility which it involves, and of your need of Almighty grace, to enable you to sustain it: and casting yourself on that grace, you shall hear a voice from heaven, saying, "It is sufficient for thee."

2. In view of our subject, we perceive that *it is the duty of every one to make a public profession of religion.* "But what," says the youth, buried in the amusements of the world, "is it *my* duty to join the church, and profess myself a christian, and come to the communion table?" I answer, Yes, undoubtedly; and the guilt of

disobeying a plain command of God, and of pouring contempt upon the blood of his Son, rests upon you, so long as you neglect to do this. Nevertheless, it is your duty to be a christian, before you profess yourself one; your duty to possess a temper that can relish communion with Christ, before you perform that external act which indicates it. There is an order here to be observed; and that is first to become a disciple, and then to assume the badge of discipleship. The latter duty you have no right to neglect; and yet you cannot perform it aright, unless you have actually yielded up the heart to God; for the acceptable performance of the one, necessarily implies that you have not neglected the other. I would say then, to every one of you, Come to the communion table; but see that you come with clean hands and a pure heart: come, having renounced the vanities of the world; having given yourselves to God in a perpetual covenant; and having resolved in the strength of his grace, that you will live as becometh the gospel of Christ.

Finally: in view of our subject, *let those youth who have actually made a profession of religion, frequently review the solemn transaction, in connexion with their subsequent conversation and deportment.* Call to mind, my young friends, the solemnity of that hour, in which you stood here, and in the presence of the church, and in the presence of the world, and in the presence of God, assumed the vows of the christian covenant. Call to mind the resolutions you then formed, the hopes you then inspired; and inquire how those resolutions have been kept, how those hopes have been fulfilled. Since that eventful hour, have you lived such a life as you then determined you would live—a life of prayer, of self-denial, of deadness to the world, of devotedness to Christ? Has your deportment been such as to recommend religion to your youthful associates; such as is fitted to impress them with a sense of its importance; or has it been careless and worldly, suited to confirm them in the

delusions of impenitence, and to lead them onward in the path to perdition? These are solemn questions: I entreat you to answer them honestly to your conscience; and remember that wherever you are, or by whomsoever you are surrounded, you act under the solemn responsibility of having publicly covenanted with God.

LECTURE XIII.

DEFENCE AGAINST TEMPTATION.

MATTHEW XXVI. 41.

WATCH AND PRAY, THAT YE ENTER NOT INTO TEMPTATION.

THE circumstances in which these words were spoken, were exceedingly tender and interesting. The blessed Jesus had retired to the garden of Gethsemane for prayer, with a view to fortify himself for the sufferings which awaited him. Peter, James, and John, who had previously been witnesses of his transfiguration, he took with him, on this occasion, to be witnesses of his agony. After his entrance into the garden, he apprized his three disciples of the extreme anguish of his soul, and directed them to remain where they were, and watch, while he advanced to a more retired spot, for the purpose of devotion. But strange to relate, the disciples, during their Master's absence, notwithstanding his extreme distress, and the express command he had given them to watch with him, fell asleep. Finding them in in this situation, on his return, he gently reproves them, by saying, "What! could ye not watch with me one hour?" and then kindly subjoins the caution in the text, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

The temptation to which our Lord here especially refers, is doubtless that to which his disciples were to be peculiarly exposed—of denying their Master, or desert-

ing his cause. Their fond expectations of temporal distinction as the followers of Jesus, were about to be disappointed; and he to whom they had looked as the deliverer of Israel, was soon to die in ignominy. In these circumstances, there was great danger, as the event proved, that they would become distrustful of Jesus, and perhaps, renounce all relation to him. Hence the caution in our text was peculiarly seasonable.

But notwithstanding this caution was originally addressed to the disciples in reference to a particular case, there is enough in common between their circumstances and those of all other christians, to warrant a general application of it. All other christians, as well as they, so long as they continue in this world, are exposed to temptation; are in danger of turning aside from the path of duty, and thus wounding their own peace, and injuring the cause of their Master. What the Saviour says, therefore, to his disciples, he says to all, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

There is one circumstance which seems to give this passage a peculiar application to christians in the morning of life:—it is that the words were originally addressed to persons, who—whatever might have been their age—and they could not have been far advanced—were young in the school of Christ. If the fact that their views of christianity were exceedingly imperfect, and that they had had but little experience of the trials which must attend a christian profession, rendered it peculiarly proper that *they* should be thus admonished, is there not a similar reason, growing out of the circumstances of all young christians, why the same caution should be earnestly urged upon *them*?

It will occur to you that, in the preceding discourse, we contemplated a youth in the solemn act of making a public profession of religion. In virtue of that act, you will instantly perceive that he sustains a new relation both to the church and the world. This is the point at

which he openly and professedly commences his warfare with temptation. Regarding the young christian in this peculiarly interesting attitude, it is the design of this discourse to illustrate THE FACT THAT HE IS IN PECULIAR DANGER OF FALLING, and to notice THE MEANS WHICH THE TEXT PRESCRIBES FOR AVOIDING THIS EVIL.

I. I am, first, to illustrate THE FACT THAT CHRISTIANS, IN THE MORNING OF LIFE, ARE PECULIARLY IN DANGER FROM TEMPTATION.

This exposure results, partly, from *a natural relish for worldly pleasure*. With most youth, previous to conversion, no doubt the love of pleasure is the ruling passion. There is a natural buoyancy of spirits incident to that period, which usually finds its element, either in scenes of gay diversion, or sensual indulgence. Whenever the heart comes under the influence of religion, it, of course, yields to the dominion of a new set of principles; and he who was before supremely a lover of pleasure, now becomes supremely a lover of God. But though the change which takes place in regeneration is great, it is not entire; and the predominating principle of the unrenewed nature—though it no longer exists as the ruling passion—still continues to operate with greater or less energy. Hence it often happens that young persons, after their conversion, discover something of the same thirst for worldly pleasure, which had previously constituted their most prominent characteristic. As there is no lack of opportunities for gratifying this thirst, there is great danger that they *will* gratify it, though at the expense of disturbing their peace of conscience, of violating their covenant engagements, and of making the cause of their Redeemer bleed.

That there are many pleasures growing out of our present condition, which, though not strictly religious, are yet rational, and may be innocently enjoyed by the christian, far be it from me to question. Such are the

pleasures resulting from the exercise of a cultivated taste, of a well regulated imagination, of the social and benevolent affections; and even of pleasures of a still lower kind—those which belong more immediately to the animal nature, the christian may innocently partake, provided he does not transcend the limits marked out by the Creator. But what I here refer to under the name of *worldly pleasure*, is that which is either wrong in itself, or which becomes so by excessive indulgence; every thing, in short, which has a tendency to check the spirit of devotion, or to diminish our interest in eternal realities. Now, that this is the tendency of what are commonly called fashionable amusements, even the more decent of them, is too obvious to admit of question: all experience proves that they serve to relax the whole spiritual system. But towards some or other of these forms of worldly pleasure, the young christian is liable to be drawn by the remains of his unsanctified nature: pleasure, more frequently than any thing else, entangles him with her silken cord, and draws him away from the plain path of christian duty.

Closely connected with the preceding remark, is another—that young christians are in peculiar danger of yielding to temptation, from *their love of social intercourse*.

As the social principle is one of the original elements of our nature, it is also one of the earliest in its developement; and perhaps it never operates with so much strength as in the morning of life. It is a principle common both to the good and the bad; and while it is capable of being made subservient to the most useful purposes, it may be perverted as a powerful auxiliary to the cause of irreligion. Most young persons, previous to their conversion, have been associated with those who are, at least, careless of religion; and who, it may ordidinarily be presumed, still remain so. Now it is by no means their duty, on becoming religious, to stand aloof from their former associates, or to assume towards them

any airs of artificial sanctity; but it *is* their duty to decline all that intercourse with them, which is marked by levity and inconsideration. Let their intercourse be as frequent and intimate as it may—only let it be conducted on christian principles—let it minister to edification and not to destruction. But need I say that the young christian is here in great danger of being led astray? He goes into a circle, where perhaps all but himself are professedly devoted to worldly pleasure; and where it is expected that the conversation will not only be worldly, but vain. It may indeed generally be presumed, that if he ventures unnecessarily into circumstances like these, he goes without even a wish to resist the current; but suppose he be cast into such a situation, by the providence of God, and unexpectedly to himself—there is still great danger that, from the influence of former habit, the fear of giving offence, or the dread of being looked upon as a reformer, he will at least connive at that which his conscience condemns; and perhaps may even give occasion to its being triumphantly said, by his careless associates, that they had one professor of religion among them, though his appearance would never have excited a suspicion of it. Whoever you are, my young friend, of whom this can be said, rely on it, you have already incurred the evil against which the caution in the text was intended to guard you.

But does the young christian ask me whether *all* his intercourse with irreligious people, must be strictly of a religious character? I answer, by no means; but it ought all to be of a *useful* character. In ordinary cases, if you would converse with an irreligious friend in respect to his own condition, it had better be a matter between you and him only; but the subject of religion is of such immense extent, that it may be introduced in some or other of its various bearings, in almost any circumstances in which the christian ought to be found; and that too without any appearance of ostentation. In

general, I would say that, in all your social intercourse with the world, you are bound to let your light shine; and while you are always to avoid whatever is inconsistent with a christian profession, you are to make it manifest, directly, by your conversation, as often as you have opportunity, that you are on the Lord's side.

But young christians are in danger of perverting their social intercourse, not only with the irreligious, but *with each other.* It usually happens, indeed, that, at their entrance on the religious life, they have a strong relish for christian intercourse, and find great delight in an unreserved interchange of thought and feeling. But experience proves that there is great danger that it will not always be so. There is danger that, as their first religious joys subside, they will approach the subject of religion with increasing reserve, till, at no distant period, it scarcely comes in, even by way of allusion. I doubt not that there are many to whose experience I might appeal for the truth of this remark—who can remember the time when they scarcely ever met but to encourage and assist each other in their christian course; whose intercourse has become scarcely less worldly than that of the world itself.

But it may be asked *what harm*, after all, results from this intercourse of which I have been speaking? Suppose young christians do, when they are together, prefer some other topic of conversation to that of religion; or suppose they occasionally enter a gay circle, and so far conform to the world as to spend a few hours in trifling conversation, or vain amusement—does this deserve any serious reprehension? I answer, I do not see how any one, with the Bible in his hand, can justify it. What is its tendency in respect to the person who engages in it? Ask any who have had experience, and if you get the honest answer, I venture to say, it will be, that this manner of spending time, has served to dissipate serious reflection, to unfit them for the duties of the closet, and

to awaken remorse, when they came to look at their conduct, in view of the Bible and of eternity. And what is its influence—what *must* be its influence, on those careless companions who have been witnesses of it? That you may estimate it aright, take into view this important truth—that mere neglect of religion will just as certainly destroy the soul, as open contempt of it. What then though you have not profaned the name of God, or spoken irreverently of religion, or committed any act which the world calls immoral; yet, by your presence and example, you have lent your sanction to a spirit of levity; a spirit which you know must be dislodged from those very individuals, or they must perish; a spirit, moreover, which, as it is in their case the ruling passion, constitutes the grand obstacle to their becoming religious. And let me say, they understand the language of your conduct, even better than you do yourself; they regard you as lending the most practical testimony to the notion that religion is gloomy; as virtually telling them that you cannot find happiness in it, and therefore you have come to seek it in the world. Or else, on the other hand, they are willing to admit, upon your authority, that religion is consistent with a spirit of levity, or perhaps even that levity, called by the more decent name of innocent cheerfulness, makes part of religion; and if this be so, they, very charitably for themselves, conclude that they are either christians already, or have little to do to become so. What more effectual means could you use, to keep them at the greatest distance from serious reflection than this? I fear that many a professing christian, if he could look into the world of wo, would see some there lifting up their eyes in torment, who would reproach him with having contributed, by his example, to that habit of carelessnes, by which they were carried down to perdition.

Again: young christians are in peculiar danger of yielding to temptation, from the fact, that *their condition*

awakens, in an unusual degree, the vigilance and activity of the wicked.

Of this fact, no person of the least observation, can entertain a doubt. It is not the christian who has lived long, and whose character is firmly established, who is most frequently assailed by the arts of the wicked; but it is the youth, who is just turning his back upon the world, and setting his face towards heaven. This fact is often strikingly illustrated after a revival of religion; when many young persons are seen entering upon a christian course, and all the wiles of the wicked are put in requisition, in order to oppose them. And the reasons of this fact are as obvious as the fact itself. Young christians have far less strength to resist temptation, than belongs to a more mature christian experience. Moreover, the wicked not only assail them under peculiar advantages, but they feel that they must do it then or never; as there is little probability, when they have once grown into established christians, that they will be carried back to the beggarly elements of the world. Now, is it not manifest that these circumstances invest the condition of young christians with peculiar danger? On every side are those who watch for their halting;—and among them, it may be, some with whom they are united in the most endearing earthly relations. By flattery, on the one hand, and ridicule on the other; by appealing first to one principle of their nature, and then to another; here to the love of pleasure, and there to the dread of being singular, they do their utmost to turn their footsteps backward into the path of death. Happy is that young christian, who, amidst so many snares, is enabled to walk uprightly, and to escape unhurt!

I observe, once more, that young christians are in peculiar danger of yielding to temptation, from the fact that *the principle of religion in their hearts is comparatively feeble.*

I have already said that this is a reason why they are especially liable to be assailed by the enemies of religion: it is equally a reason why they are in peculiar danger of yielding to temptation. The rapturous exercises and burning zeal which are often manifested by the new convert, are, by no means, to be regarded as any pledge in respect to future character; nor are they to be considered as indicating even the present existence of a high degree of religion. In almost all cases, these strong feelings, after a little period, subside; and he who, at first, imagined that he had faith enough to remove mountains, soon learns that, if he has any faith at all, it is only as a grain of mustard seed. The principle of spiritual life in his soul, like the principle of natural life in an infant, is feeble in its operations; and though Almighty power and grace are pledged for its preservation, it is less able to endure the storms of temptation, than after it shall have gained more strength and maturity. You thought, my young friend, while you were standing on the mount, and overlooking your path to heaven, that you were girded for a conflict with all your spiritual enemies. The temptations of the world appeared to you as less than nothing, and you supposed it impossible that you should ever even agitate the question whether you would yield to them. You seemed to yourself to have large stores of strength at command, and to be able to march with a firm step, even to the martyr's stake. But since you have come down from the mount, to the actual reality of trial and conflict, Oh how differently does the case appear! Your resolution which you expected would accomplish wonders, proves to be a feeble principle. Your zeal, which once rose in a bright flame towards heaven, has, in a great measure, died away. Your hope, which had formerly mounted up well nigh to assurance, has sunk to a low point of doubt, and perhaps sometimes trembles on the point of extinction. In short, you now feel that, if you are a christian, the actings of spiritual

life are so weak as scarcely to be discernible; and perhaps even to give occasion for distressing apprehensions that you are yet dead in trespasses and sins. In these circumstances, how much are you in danger of yielding to temptation! How much reason is there to fear that the world will gain a victory over you, which will mar your peace, cloud your evidences, and diminish your usefulness!

II. Having now attempted to illustrate the fact that young christians are in peculiar danger from temptation, I proceed, secondly, to illustrate THE MEANS WHICH THE TEXT PRESCRIBES FOR AVOIDING THIS EVIL. They are *watchfulness* and *prayer*. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

It is a truth distinctly implied in this direction, and one of great practical importance, that *watchfulness and prayer ought always to exist together*. Watchfulness without prayer, is self-confidence; prayer without watchfulness, is presumption. In the one case, we proudly repose for security in our own strength; in the other, we pervert the scriptural doctrine of dependence to fatalism. They are two things which God hath joined together in his word; and both reason and experience sanction the connexion. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

We will now inquire *in what manner* the duties enjoined in the text are to be performed.

1. In respect to the first of these duties, viz. *watchfulness*—I observe, that you are to watch against the *occasions* of temptation.

There are indeed temptations of various kinds involved in our providential allotments: the plain path of duty is often beset with them, so that you cannot decline to encounter the one, without, at the same time, turning your back upon the other. In all cases of this kind, you are to

go forward unhesitatingly; not doubting that you are called of God to the conflict, and that if you arm yourself suitably for it, he will give you the victory. The occasions of temptation against which you are to watch, are of a different kind; they are needless occasions—those which offer themselves, not in the course of duty, but in the pursuit of mere worldly pleasure or advantage. For instance, something presents itself to your view as an object of desire, which is by no means necessary to your comfort, and which will not contribute, in any degree, to your usefulness. But in order to attain it, you must place yourself in circumstances in which you will be exceedingly liable to fall into sin. The case then is clear, that you ought not to place yourself in these circumstances; for while the good to be attained is little or nothing, the evil to which you are exposed may be immense. Or you may think to expose yourself to temptation, where there is no other purpose to be gained than merely to test your own strength; to secure to yourself the pleasure resulting from a victory. Here again, you place yourself on the enemies' ground without a warrant; you rush into the field, before you have orders from the Captain of salvation; and you have nothing to expect but that your presumption will be punished by an ignominious defeat. I repeat, then, watch against all needless occasions of temptation. While you are careful not to decline any conflict to which you are called in the course of duty, be equally careful not to volunteer your service in this way, where there is no occasion.

Watch against the *power* of temptation. I have already said that, in the discharge of duty, you will often necessarily be placed in circumstances in which you may be tempted: here then your whole vigilance is to be put in requisition, that you do not fall; and you have every encouragement to this course from the fact that you are engaged in the cause, and at the bidding, of your Master. "Count it all joy," says the apostle James, "when

ye fall into divers temptations ;" *i. e.* if God in his providence bring his children into temptation, it may be an occasion of joy to them, as furnishing additional evidence of *his* paternal kindness in bringing them through it, and of *their* renovation. As temptation derives its power chiefly from a wrong state of the heart, it is especially necessary, when you are placed in these circumstances, that you should keep your heart with all diligence. You are to cultivate indeed, at all times, that lively sense of divine things, that spiritual and heavenly frame of feeling, which will be most likely to shield you from this evil ; but you are to take special care to bring yourself under the influence of religious feelings, as you are about to approach a scene of temptation. You are to go with your whole soul bathed in the holy influences of the gospel ; with that spirit which prompted the blessed Redeemer, in similar circumstances, to say, " Get thee behind me, Satan." And if you discover the least drawing of your affections towards the forbidden object, you are to regard it as a signal for alarm ; and when you have once begun to dally with the temptation, to institute the inquiry with yourself whether you may yield to it or not, or to cast about you for palliating circumstances, rely on it you have already begun to sink under its power. Watch, watch, my young friends, against the beginning of this evil.

Watch *unto prayer*.

Watch for *opportunities* of prayer. It is an important part of christian economy to have stated seasons for private devotion ; for experience proves that where this duty is made a matter of convenience merely, and is left to occupy only the remnants of time which may be occasionally gathered up from the occupations of the world, there is a chilling influence exerted, under which all the graces of the christian languish. Be careful, therefore, that you have stated seasons for visiting your closet ; and let your worldly concerns all be arranged, so far as possible, with reference to these seasons. When you foresee

providential circumstances which will prevent you from observing the usual hour, anticipate your devotions; and when you are prevented by some unexpected event, instead of passing over the duty for that time, avail yourself of the first opportunity to perform it. I know indeed that the form of this duty may be observed, without the spirit: but if the form be habitually neglected, it is scarcely too much to say that the spirit is wanting of course.

I am aware that there are many situations in which the discharge of this duty is attended with peculiar difficulties; and there is much reason to fear that many young professors, after struggling with these difficulties for a while, come, at length, to regard them as constituting an apology for the neglect of the duty altogether. Hence, I have no doubt, it is, that many a youth who once gave fair promise of being a devoted christian, has sunk into a state of spiritual apathy so deep as scarcely to be distinguished from the lethargy of impenitence. As you would avoid this tremendous evil, my young friends, guard against that neglect of secret devotion, which will be sure to lead to it. If your circumstances subject you to peculiar embarrassment in reference to this duty, endeavor to counteract their unfavorable influence, by a double degree of watchfulness and diligence. There is hardly any condition in which you will be likely to be placed, but by proper exertion, you may secure at least some moments every day for retirement; and where this is impracticable, you may, and ought, to lift up your heart to God in silent ejaculations. If, in his providence, he places you in a condition in which you can commune with him in no other manner, such an offering, no doubt, will be accepted.

But you are also to watch for the *spirit* of prayer. Without the spirit of devotion, the form is mere hypocrisy; though, as has been already intimated, we are not to look for the spirit, where the form is habitually neglected. It should be your object to watch for this spirit *constantly;* not merely when you go into your closet,

but amidst your ordinary cares and occupations. In the workshop, or on the farm, or in the counting-room, even in those circumstances which would seem least favorable to devotional feeling, you may still occasionally retire within yourself, and do something to fan the sacred flame. You should watch for this spirit in the events of providence, which either occur in your experience, or fall under your observation; whether they are adapted to deepen humility, to quicken faith, to nourish gratitude, or to bring into exercise any other of the elements of devotion. And whenever you discover the Holy Spirit's operation in the silent movements of your soul towards heaven, Oh cherish this divine influence with peculiar care. Be not satisfied till the spirit of devotion is plentifully shed abroad in your heart, and your soul is filled with all the fulness of God.

Moreover, you are to watch for *answers* to prayer. If you should ask some signal favor of an earthly superior, and it should not be granted, you would naturally be led to inquire whether there were not something in the manner of your asking, which prevented the bestowment of it. In like manner, if you do not receive the blessings which you ask of God, it may well lead you to review your prayers—especially the spirit with which they have been offered—and see whether your want of sincerity, or faith, or perseverance, does not constitute the grand obstacle to their being answered. On the other hand, if your prayers actually are answered, you should notice it as a ground of thanksgiving and encouragement: if you have reason to believe that, in answer to your petitions, some sore temptation which threatened you has been averted, or that you have received an increased measure of strength to encounter some temptation into which you have been brought, while you give God the glory, you will feel new resolution for your future conflicts, and new encouragement to cast yourself upon divine aid.

2. But the other duty which the text enjoins as a means of defence against temptation, is *prayer*. Concerning this, let me say,

That you are to pray that *God will not permit you to fall into temptation, above what you are able to bear.*

"In all thy ways acknowledge God, and He will direct thy paths." He knows perfectly what temptations, with a given degree of strength, you will be able to overcome; and he is abundantly able so to arrange events in his providence, that the temptations to which you are exposed, shall not exceed your ability of resistance. Let it be your prayer, then, that he will prevent you from being placed in circumstances which will involve temptations too powerful for you; and if you should heedlessly seek such a situation, that he will oppose insurmountable obstacles to your arriving at it.

But, on the other hand, you are to pray that, if in the providence of God, you fall *into* great temptation, you may be prevented, by an increased degree of grace, from falling *before* it. There are some cases in which the temptation cannot be anticipated; as it results from circumstances into which you are brought contrary to your expectations: but in such cases, it is your duty to send up a silent petition to God, that he will grant you grace equal to the exigency. Other cases there are in which the temptation approaches gradually, and you have time to discipline your heart, and offer your prayers, in view of it. But as you are never secure in this respect, you are always to pray for the sustaining and overcoming influences of divine grace; to pray that whatever may be the character of the temptation which you are called to meet, you may have strength from on high proportioned to it. With such preparation as this for your spiritual conflict, you will be in little danger of being vanquished.

And finally, you are to pray *that you may be watchful.* A spirit of watchfulness, as you have seen, is absolutely essential to preserve you from falling into sin; and is,

therefore, to be regarded as a most important blessing. But, like every other blessing, it must come from God, and must be sought by prayer. Let the petition, then, often go up from your heart, that you may be enabled to carry a watchful spirit with you into all your intercourse with your fellow-christians, and with the world; that you may watch against the occasions of temptation, and against its power; that you may watch for opportunities of prayer—for the spirit of prayer—for answers to prayer. And if you follow these directions, you will find that the two duties, or rather the two parts of the same duty, which I have been urging, will exert a mutually favorable influence upon each other; that while watchfulness will promote the spirit of prayer, prayer in its turn will increase the spirit of watchfulness; and that together they will constitute an adequate defence against temptation.

On a review of our subject, we remark, first, that *the christian life is a life of great activity.* Is not the life of the soldier, stationed in an enemy's country, exposed to innumerable stratagems, and often called out to battle, an active life? What say you then of the life of the christian, who has to "wrestle not against flesh and blood" only, "but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places?" And if there be occasion for *every* christian to be constantly active, in order to prosecute with success the warfare to which he is called, is not this emphatically true of the *young* christian, who is assailed by a thousand temptations, and yet is comparatively unfurnished for the conflict? Better a thousand fold think to remain idle on the field of battle, or when a band of murderers are plotting for your destruction, than to think to encounter the enemies which the young christian has to meet, without severe effort.

But, though the christian life is a life of activity, that activity is itself a source of enjoyment It is not idleness, but exertion—persevering, successful exertion, which

makes men happy. It is the privilege of the christian who has triumphed in the conflict with his spiritual enemies, to enjoy a peaceful, grateful, confiding state of mind, in view of that grace which gives him the present victory, and of that glory which will crown his final triumph. Even Heaven itself, the abode of perfect happiness, though not a scene of warfare, is a place of activity; for its inhabitants "rest not day nor night," but "give glory, and honor, and thanks, to Him that sitteth on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever."

I ask you, then, my young friend, in view of the consideration now suggested, to examine anew your claim to the christian character. Is *your* religion a religion of indolent ease, or of vigorous effort? Are you satisfied to float down with the current of temptation, or do you exert yourself to the utmost to resist it? Do you lead a life of watchfulness and prayer, or are you contented to leave open the doors of your heart to every temptation? Be not deceived. If the path in which you are walking is smooth and easy; if you find in it little of conflict and self-denial, you may imagine indeed that you have found an easy way to heaven, but take heed lest the event should prove that you had been walking in the broad road to hell.

Again: Learn from this subject, that *the christian's actual strength is in proportion to his sense of weakness.* "When I am weak," said the apostle, "then am I strong;" and the same spiritual paradox occurs in the experience of every christian. Observe the solution of it. When the christian, looking round upon his spiritual enemies, and looking inward upon himself, feels his inability to grapple with them; when he is brought most deeply to realize that, in his own strength, he can do nothing; then he is induced to cast himself on the boundless resources of God's grace. If left to his own unassisted efforts, he feels that he is as helpless as an infant; but girded with Omnipotence, he can do all things. To a spirit of activity, then, my young friends, join a spirit of dependence. Be

fearless of temptation, only when you repose in Jehovah your strength. And let every victory which you gain, while it ministers to your humility by reminding you of your own weakness, carry your soul upward to Almighty God in devout thanksgiving for his all-conquering grace.

Finally: *Happy they who are trained up in this world of conflict, for a world of glory!* There are those who enjoy far less happiness than the christian, who, by living here, are prepared only for a world of despair; but the christian, by the warfare which he maintains, in the strength of Almighty grace, is becoming qualified for the everlasting communion of angels. Does the thought ever rise in your heart, my young friend, in some moments of impatience, that these struggles with temptation are almost too severe to be endured? Beyond that dark valley which lies a little way onward in your path, and into which you will soon descend, there is a bright region of immortal glory. You cannot see it now; for the darkness that hangs around that valley obstructs your vision; but as sure as you are enlisted in Jehovah's service, you will soon be there. And thence you will look back upon the conflicts of this short period of your existence, and weep, if tears can be in heaven, that you should ever have felt a sentiment of reluctance at enduring them. Travel on then, young christian; for though young, the hills of Canaan will soon greet your longing eyes. And is it so, that you are so near that bright inheritance? Is it so, that sweet fields beyond the swelling floods, watered by the river of life, and smiling with immortal verdure, are so soon to receive your weary feet? Welcome then all the horrors of this howling desert; welcome all the fiery serpents which hell itself can send out; welcome the most rough and stormy passage over Jordan, if this brief hour of conflict is to be succeeded by an eternity of glory!

LECTURE XIV.

CHRISTIAN DECISION.

DANIEL III. 18.

BE IT KNOWN UNTO THEE, O KING, THAT WE WILL NOT SERVE THY GODS, NOR WORSHIP THY GOLDEN IMAGE WHICH THOU HAST SET UP.

THERE is not perhaps recorded in the sacred volume a more signal instance of human pride and impiety, than we find in the narrative with which our text is connected. Nebuchadnezzar, the haughty and infatuated king of Babylon, having greatly enriched himself by his conquest of the surrounding nations, and especially the Jews, erected a monstrous golden image to his god Belus in the plain of Dura. Having convened his princes, governors, captains, judges, and other officers under him, to the dedication of this idol, he issued a decree that, at a certain signal, every man should prostrate himself before it in token of adoration; and that, if any one refused to obey the mandate, he should do it at the fearful expense of being cast into a fiery furnace. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, three men who were originally of the princes of Judea, and were carried captive to Babylon in their youth, refused, from conscientious considerations, to submit to this horrible requisition; upon which they were immediately summoned into the king's presence, to answer for their disobedience. On their appearing before him, they were

again offered the alternative of rendering homage to the idol, or of being cast into the furnace. But they hesitated not a moment. With a noble firmness which could face the frown of a mighty monarch, and even the most appalling horrors of martyrdom, they replied, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of thy hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship thy golden image which thou hast set up."

In the conduct of these men on this occasion, we have a noble instance of genuine CHRISTIAN DECISION. I design, in this discourse, to avail myself of the declaration in the text, to recommend the cultivation of this trait of character to young christians. And in doing so, I will call your attention briefly to its *nature* and its *advantages*.

I. In respect to the *nature* of Christian Decision, I observe that it is something *entirely different from mere native firmness of character*. Every one knows that the original constitutions of men, intellectual and moral, as well as physical, are exceedingly diverse. One, for instance, is originally irritable; another, so placid as scarcely to be moved by any provocation. One is constitutionally ingenuous; another, inclined to concealment: one is timid and wavering; another, firm and resolute. Now this latter quality, mere natural firmness, differs from christian decision in this important particular—that it is not of course subject to the dictates of conscience, or directed by a regard to duty. The resolution of the man of the world may prompt him to deeds of injustice, deeds of cruelty, as well as to acts of generosity and compassion; and where this trait happens to be associated with an overbearing and revengeful spirit, instead of being a blessing to its possessor or the world, it is sure to be a curse to both. Many a bad man has been a scourge to the com-

munity in which he has lived, and even to the world, who, without this native heroism of character, would have been comparatively harmless.

Christian decision may be defined, in general, as *that quality which resolutely determines a man to do his duty, at all times, without an improper regard to consequences.* What are some of the *elements* of which this spirit is composed?

1. *A clear conviction of duty.* No man is prepared to act at all, much less with decision, so long as he is at loss where the path of duty lies; and the certain consequence of being embarrassed on this point, will be, that his efforts, at best, will be feeble, inconstant, and inefficient. The very reflection that he is acting without a settled conviction of duty, and still more, the reflection that he may be acting contrary to the will of God, taking it for granted that he is a good man, will be fitted to wound his conscience, and weaken his resolution. Let him then who would possess genuine christian decision, make it his first object to ascertain the path of duty. Let him do this by attentively considering the leadings of God's providence, by faithfully consulting an enlightened conscience, and above all by earnestly looking for divine guidance and teaching. And having once gained a clear and impressive conviction of what duty is, he is prepared for resolute and decided action.

In most cases in which we are called to act, the path of duty, to an honest and well directed mind, is plain. For instance, when Nebuchadnezzar commanded the three men to worship his idol, there was no cause for a moment's hesitation; nor did they wish for a moment to enable them to decide that they would not do it. And far the greater part of the cases of duty upon which christians at the present day have to decide, are as clear as that which was presented to the consideration of these men. And where it is otherwise—where there are circumstancs to embarrass us in our inquiries and our decision, this

only constitutes a demand for more earnest consideration and prayer. It may safely be said, that there are few instances in which the christian, after using all the means in his power to ascertain his duty, is still left in the dark respecting it.

2. Another of the elements of christian decision, and that in which it especially consists, is *an unyielding purpose to act agreeably to our sincere and enlightened convictions*. It is one thing to know what we ought to do, and quite a different thing to do it; and it is to little purpose that we gain the knowledge of our duty, unless we reduce that knowledge to practice. The individuals whose example is exhibited in our text, were not only settled in the conviction that they *ought* not, but in the purpose that they *would* not, bow down before the idol; and the language in which they refused to do it, shows that they were inflexible in their determination. And so it is with every truly decided christian. You may threaten him with the loss of every thing he holds dear on this side heaven; you may kindle a fiery furnace, and tell him he shall have his portion in it; you may bring before him the horrors of the prisoner's dungeon, or the martyr's stake, and you will not shake his constancy in the course of duty: there is a holy resolution in his soul, kindled up by the breathing of God's Spirit, which the terrors of death itself cannot appal.

3. Another element of christian decision, is *a firm confidence in God*. This the three men strikingly exhibited in their refusal to yield to the king's impious command. What if they should be thrown into the fiery furnace, which was made ready to receive them? They had full confidence that their God would preserve them unhurt, even amidst those fearful perils. And if he did not, they knew what their duty was, and that in some way or other God would bless them in the discharge of it: and they doubted not that, if their bodies should be consumed in such a cause, they would be abundantly com-

pensated for the sacrifice by the glories of eternity. And what they felt and exhibited, was, by no means, peculiar to themselves: every truly decided christian exemplifies the same spirit. If the duty to which he is called is difficult, he confides in God for grace to enable him to discharge it. If he is doubtful in respect to consequences, he trusts in God to give them such a direction as will be most for his glory. If he has reason to believe that, in obeying the divine will, he shall involve himself in distressing worldly calamities, here again he confides in God to deliver him out of them in his own best time, or to cause them to work out for him an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. No one accustomed to attempt the discharge of duty in his own strength, ever possessed true christian decision. A nobler principle of action—a constant reliance on the Lord our strength, is absolutely necessary to constitute the truly decided christian.

II. I proceed, secondly, to consider some of the *advantages* which christian decision secures.

1. And, first, a decided course is the most *safe* course. It was so in the case of the three men whose decision is exhibited in our text. There was indeed in that case, to the eye of worldly calculation, the most appalling danger hanging over the path of duty. Nothing appeared but that their lives were in fearful jeopardy, and that they were on the eve of suffering a most agonizing death. The king's anger was excited to fury, and he commanded that the impious order which he had given for their destruction should be executed without delay. Accordingly they were thrown into the fiery furnace which was made ready for them; and doubtless not the king only, but every one who was present, expected to see them instantly become victims to the flames. And what was the result? Why that these three men were seen walking in the midst of the furnace unhurt, under the protection of one whose form is said to have been like the Son of God; and the

king rose up in astonishment, and immediately commanded them to come out of the furnace, acknowledging the power of Jehovah in their preservation.

And as it was in that case, so it is substantially in all others—a decided course is the safe course. Not that christians, in ordinary cases, can expect a miraculous interposition in their behalf when they are brought into circumstances of danger; but God does usually extend to them his special care and protection. If difficulties rise and seem to hedge up their path, they are usually brought out of them in some way which they had not anticipated. And even if their decision leads them to encounter death in the cause of duty, it is the safe course still; for it is most emphatically true in this case, that "he that loseth his life, shall find it." It is perfectly safe to die in the cause of duty; but it is unspeakably hazardous to live at the expense of denying Christ. The three men would have been safe, in the most important sense of the word, if the flames had instantly consumed them; for that religion on account of which they had died, would have been a certain passport to heaven. And so is every christian safe who yields up his life in similar circumstances; for the crown of martyrdom here, will be exchanged for a crown of glory hereafter.

2. A decided course is the most *easy* course. I do not intend here to imply that a professing christian may not sometimes, in consequence of his decision, be subjected to severe trials; or, on the other hand, that by a timid and temporizing course, he may not sometimes avoid trials: but I mean that, on the whole, the decided christian will be far less embarrassed in the discharge of duty, than any other. Would Nebuchadnezzar, do you imagine, after having witnessed the decision of these men, and the consequences of it, have been likely to repeat the experiment which he made, or to have tried any other means to induce them to worship his idol? Would he not rather have abandoned it as a hopeless case, satis-

fied that they were determined to adhere to the worship of Jehovah, and that Jehovah would assuredly preserve and bless them in it? And the same effect, substantially, is produced upon the world by every instance of decision in christians. Let the christian, when the world spreads its temptations before him, show himself determined and able to resist them: let him, when solicited by his former careless associates to the haunts of sin, exhibit a firmness of opposition, which their cavils, or sneers, or flatteries do not shake; and let him repeat this in a few instances, and he will probably have occasion to repeat it no more; for they will become satisfied that their efforts are unavailing, and will think it best to retire from the conflict. Let him, on the other hand, when he is tempted, show himself half inclined to yield; let him manifest a disposition to conform to the world so far as he possibly can without sacrificing his christian character; let him look with some degree of indulgence on forbidden pleasures, and often be found amid scenes of thoughtlessness, and you may rest assured that that individual will be perpetually and painfully embarrassed. Every instance in which he yields to the claims of the careless and wicked, will encourage them to renew their demands upon him; and it will be strange if they suffer him to rest, before he has practically disavowed his regard for religion, and sunk the character of the christian in that of the worldling.

3. A decided course is the most *useful* course. This is evident from the fact that *many of those deeds which are followed by the most important and permanent benefit to the world, could never be performed without christian decision.* Witness, for instance, the conduct of Moses in turning his back upon the rich temporal advantages which were held out to him as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Nothing but genuine decision could have influenced him to the course which he adopted; and yet, what immense benefits were derived from his conduct,

under God, to the Jewish nation and to the world! And what was true of the consequences of his conduct, has been true, in a greater or less degree, in thousands of other cases. And besides this, the decided christian, by his *general character*, exerts an influence of the most salutary kind, which is peculiar to himself. All who see him, take knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus; and wherever he goes, he leaves an impression in favor of the religion he professes.

The undecided professor, on the other hand, is continually *making the cause of religion bleed.* He may indeed, when he is in the company of christians alone, appear like a christian: you might even think him zealous and active. But in the presence of the world, he seems as indifferent to religion as the world itself. If any severe cross is to be taken up in the path of duty, he has no resolution for such a service. What the influence of such an example, and such a character must be, no one can be at loss to determine.

Let the appeal be to *facts*. Look around you, and tell me whether you really believe that professing christian exerts the happiest influence, whose life is a perpetual scene of unwarrantable compliances with the maxims of the world; who dares never to take a decided stand on the side of duty, when duty happens to be the unpopular side; or whether it is not he who is steadfast and immoveable; who fearlessly discharges the most difficult duties, and resolutely resists the most powerful temptations? I know there is not one of you, whose conscience must not return an answer in favor of the decided christian.

4. A decided course is the most *honorable* course. That it actually is so in the view of *God, and all holy beings*, none can question: for the decided christian faithfully conforms his conduct to God's will, and makes it his unceasing object to promote God's glory, and to advance the interests of his spiritual kingdom. But I

venture to go farther, and assert that he is the most honorable man in the view of *the world;* and even of the most wicked part of it. For wicked men, let it be remembered, have eyes and ears; have reason and conscience; and they know what is right, and what is wrong, as well as others. I do not say indeed that their hearts will relish the decision of the devoted christian; but I do say that their consciences will approve it: I do say that they will have a secret reverence for such a character, corresponding to the contempt which they feel towards its opposite: and there are a thousand cases in which they have an opportunity to manifest, and actually do manifest, their preference, in their conduct. If, for instance, the wicked man has any important trust which he wishes to put in charge with one of his fellow-men, to be executed after he is dead, rely on it, he will be far more likely to leave it with the man of unyielding religious principles, than any other person; thus proving that the contempt with which he might sometimes have appeared to regard such a character, was mere affectation; and that he actually regarded it with respect and veneration.

5. A decided course is the most *happy* course. It is so, because it is the only course that *keeps a man on good terms with his own conscience;* and without an approving conscience, the universe could not make him happy. Just in proportion as a professing christian is undecided, he loses the approbation of his conscience, and of course, in the same degree, forfeits his enjoyment.

Moreover, it is a source of rich enjoyment to the decided christian, *to see the benefits which result from his decision;* the influence which he thereby exerts in building up the cause of Christ. It is a delightful reflection that, in all his efforts, God is glorified in some way or other; and that he may hope to be instrumental in saving souls from death and hiding a multitude of sins.

By maintaining a decided character, the christian also *lays a foundation for a peaceful and happy death.* He

may expect indeed that large measures of peace and comfort will be granted him from above, during his life: but especially has he a right to expect that this will be realized when flesh and heart are failing. Not that any thing which he has done will be regarded by him, as constituting the least part of the ground of his acceptance: still he will look back, and he will have a right to look back upon his life, with gratitude to that God who has enabled him to stand firm amidst all the temptations to which he has been exposed, and with joy unspeakable, that his imperfect services may be crowned with the benedictions of his Lord. It was especially this trait of character upon which we have been meditating, which put such rapture and triumph into the dying expressions of the apostle:—"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me at that day."

And as a decided course is the most happy in its progress, it is also the most happy *in its result:* for though the rewards of eternity will all be of rich grace, yet they will be proportioned to the zeal and fidelity which have here marked the christian's labors. While the timid and worldly-minded christian (if the expression be not a solecism) will be saved so as by fire, the truly decided one will have an abundant entrance ministered to him into the kingdom of our Father; nay, he will shine as the brightness of the firmament and as the stars for ever and ever.

Enough, I trust, has been said, my young friends, to convince you that decision in your religious course is most intimately connected with your usefulness, your comfort, and your character: let me now conclude with a single remark—it is that *if you do not become decided now, there is little probability that you ever will.* Decided indeed you must be, in a degree, or you cannot be a christian; but I speak here of that degree of decision

which, according to the common understanding of the term, shall entitle you to be considered a decided christian. And I repeat—unless you acquire this character now, at the commencement of your christian course, there is little reason to believe that you ever will acquire it: because every step that you take in the way of conformity to the world, will multiply the temptations around you, and will diminish your strength of resistance. On the other hand, if you begin right, and fix upon an elevated standard of duty, though it may cost you a severe effort at first, your course will soon become easy and delightful. Dare then, my young friends, to do your duty at all times and at all hazards. Never be afraid to stand alone in a good cause. If the world spreads before you its brilliant and tempting scenes, remember that you are not of the world, and that you are to have no communion with its sinful pleasures. When difficulties and trials throng the path of duty, remember that you have professed to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus, and that the motto of a disciple is "self-denial." In short, wherever you are—whether among the friends or the enemies of Christ, act consistently with your profession and your hopes. In this way, you will secure to yourself the full amount of blessing which religion is fitted to impart. In this way, you will travel onward to the grave, cheered by the tokens of God's gracious presence; and beyond it, you will walk over the plains of immortality, in the full radiance of the Redeemer's throne.

LECTURE XV.

GROWTH IN GRACE.

2d PETER III. 18.

GROW IN GRACE.

It is an error common with young christians, that when the first joys of a renovated state have passed away, the current of their affections sets back strongly towards the world. Judging from their appearance, in many instances, we should say that they gave little promise of being faithful soldiers of the cross; that instead of guarding more closely against their spiritual enemies, and girding themselves more thoroughly for conflict, they were casting from them the armor with which they were actually furnished, and dismissing the sentinels already stationed at the door of their hearts. They would seem to be acting upon the conviction that the course of exercises through which they had passed, constituted certain evidence of regeneration; and that regeneration not only begins, but completes, their preparation for heaven.

Our text is adapted, my young friends, to guard you against this mistaken view of the religious life. It clearly implies that regeneration is but the beginning of religion in the heart, and of course, leaves the subject of it but partially sanctified; that the christian life is a life of constant improvement; and that this improvement is inti-

mately connected with our own exertions. It is the design of this discourse to illustrate the *nature*, the *means*, the *importance* of GROWTH IN GRACE.

I. *What is it* to grow in grace?

The word *grace* is used in the New Testament with various shades of meaning; but in the text it evidently denotes practical piety, or the religion of the heart and life. To grow in grace, therefore, is, in general, *to make progress in religion.*

More particularly,

1. It is implied in this duty, that you grow, not merely in the *means* of religion, but in *religion itself.*

The use of means always supposes that there is an end to be attained; and this holds true in respect to religion, as well as any thing else. But it would seem that this connexion between the means and the end, is, by many professed christians, in a great measure, overlooked; and that, for the actual attainment of grace, they substitute the means by which it is to be attained. In the regularity of their attendance on religious services, they seem practically to forget the purpose for which these services were designed; so that, instead of ministering to the growth of religion, they serve only to cherish a spirit of self-righteousness. Think not that I would discourage the most diligent use of means: I would only put you on your guard against defeating the purpose for which they are designed, by an *improper* use of them. Let them be used, and used daily; but let it be with reference to the attainment of an end—the promotion of religion in the heart and life; and so long as this purpose is not answered, remember that they have not exerted their proper influence. When the effect of them is to increase your love to God and man, to quicken your faith, to deepen your humility, and to cause you to abound more and more in every christian virtue, then and only then, is their legitimate purpose accomplished.

Growth in grace, then, you perceive, involves not only a diligent use of the means of grace, but also the attainment of the end for which these means were designed. While the end is not, at least in the ordinary course of providence, to be attained without the means, the means are of no importance, except from their connexion with the end. He who grows in grace, in the use of the one, attains the other.

2. The duty which we are contemplating, implies that you grow, not in *some particular* parts of religion only, but in *every* part.

The christian character, though made up of a variety of graces and virtues, is a well-proportioned and beautiful whole. But as there is a strong disposition to separate the means and the end in the religious life, there is a similar propensity often manifested to deform the christian character, by neglecting to cultivate some of the traits of which it is composed. Hence we often see professed christians, who, in some respects, seem to be closely conformed to the gospel standard, who, yet, in others, exhibit so little of the spirit of Christ, as to occasion distressing doubts whether they are really his disciples. Now, if you would comply with the duty enjoined in the text, you must guard against this evil. You need not indeed fear that you shall superabound in any of the virtues of the gospel; but take heed that there be none in which you are deficient. Let your standard of piety be as elevated as it may—but let your christian character rise in just and beautiful proportions.

3. The duty enjoined in the text, moreover, implies that you should grow in religion, not at *particular* times only, but at *all* times.

There is, I fear, an impression too common among young christians, that the religious character is to be formed chiefly from the influence of great occasions. When, for instance, they are visited by severe affliction, they feel that it is a time for diligently cultivating reli-

gion ; but let the rod of God be withdrawn, and they too commonly relapse into a state of comparative indolence. Or let there be a revival of religion in their immediate neighborhood—and you will see them coming forth to the work in a spirit of humility and self-denial : but let carelessness resume its dominion over the surrounding multitude, and they too, in many instances, will be seen settled down to a point of freezing indifference. They doubt not that it is the duty of christians to make progress in religion ; but they seem to imagine that, by extraordinary diligence at one time, they may atone for some degree of negligence at another. Now we do not deny that there are occasions in the christian's life, and among them those to which we have referred, which are peculiarly favorable to his improvement, and for which he ought diligently to watch ; but the notion against which we protest is, that there is *any* period, in which he may fold his hands in indolence. While you are to improve, with special care, those seasons which furnish peculiar advantages for the cultivation of piety, remember that religion is to be the work of every day ; that in seasons of prosperity as well as of adversity, in seasons of coldness as well as of revival, in every condition in which you may be placed, you are bound to grow in grace.

II. If such be the nature, we will now inquire, secondly, what are the *means*, of growth in grace. These are very numerous : we will specify some of the more prominent.

1. We notice, first, the *private duties of religion*, comprehending *meditation*, *prayer*, and *reading the scriptures*.

I would say, in general, in respect to *all* these duties, that, before you approach them, you should *throw down the burden of worldly care and vexation*. The bird which possesses the fleetest wing will never fly, if she is oppressed with an insupportable load ; neither will the

soul ever mount up to heaven in its contemplations, until it has broken away from earthly incumbrances. You should address yourself to these duties with great *seriousness;* for they bring you into the immediate presence of God, on an errand which deeply involves your immortal interests; and the absence of a serious spirit converts the external act into the most impious mockery. Moreover, they should *all* be performed, as I have elsewhere had occasion to remark in respect to one, at *stated seasons;* and especially in the morning and evening of each day. But the performance of these duties, at stated seasons, should not supersede the *occasional* performance of them. As the circumstances in which you are placed, may furnish opportunity, or suggest occasion, for private religious exercises, you should consider it at once your duty and your privilege to engage in them.

We will dwell, for a moment, a little more particularly, on these several duties.

Of *religious meditation*, considered as a means of growth in grace, it may be remarked that it is not merely a speculative, but *practical* exercise: the object of it is, not merely to discover truth, but when discovered, to turn it to some practical advantage. If, for instance, the mind dwells on the infinite greatness and majesty of God, the heart kindles with a sentiment of holy admiration. If the mind contemplates the unparalleled love and mercy of God, the heart glows with a spirit of devout gratitude. If the mind contemplates the depravity and ruin of man, and particularly if it turns its eye inward on personal guilt, the bosom heaves with emotions of godly sorrow. And so in respect to every other subject to which the thoughts may be directed—the mind contemplates them not as subjects of abstract speculation, but of personal interest.

The *subjects* proper to exercise the mind in meditation, are almost infinitely various. Whatever God has re-

vealed to us, whether through the medium of his works, his ways, or his word, may form a profitable theme of contemplation for the christian. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work." The system of providence also, exhibits a constant divine agency, and in the minutest, as well as in the greatest, events, presents an impressive view of the character of God. And while the dispensations of providence in general furnish suitable subjects of reflection, this is especially true of those events which more immediately respect ourselves; whether they assume the form of mercies or afflictions. But the Bible is an inexhaustible treasury of truth: it contains things into which even angels desire to look; and which will no doubt awaken the interest, and employ the curiosity, of angels, for ever. Our own character and condition also, constitute, though not one of the most pleasant, yet to us one of the most important, subjects of meditation. From these various sources, then, you may derive materials for religious contemplation; and who will not say that here is enough to employ the mind in all the circumstances and periods of its existence?

One of the most important forms of the duty of which I am speaking, is *self-examination;* or meditating upon ourselves with a view to ascertain our own character and condition. You are to examine yourself in respect to your *sins;*—the sins of your whole life; the sins of particular periods, especially of each passing day; the sins which most easily beset you; and all the circumstances of aggravation by which your sins have been attended. You are to examine yourself in respect to your *spiritual wants;* to inquire in which of the christian graces you are especially deficient; through what avenue the world assails you most successfully, and, of course, at what point you need to be most strongly fortified. You are to examine yourself in respect to your *evidences of christian character;*—to inquire whe-

ther you have really the spirit of christian obedience, and whether that spirit is daily gaining strength. This inquiry is to be conducted with great *vigilance;* otherwise, the heart is so deceitful, that you will deceive yourself in the very attempt to avoid being deceived. It must be prosecuted with unyielding *determination;* for the work is in itself so difficult, and withal, the discoveries which must result from it so painful, that, without this spirit, it will inevitably be abandoned. You must refer your character to the *scriptural standard;*—to the *law*, if you would ascertain the extent of your departure from duty; to the *gospel*, if you would test your claim to the christian character. And finally, in the spirit of *humble dependence*, let all your efforts be accompanied and crowned by the prayer—"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

The *importance* of self-examination, and of the more general duty of meditation, of which this is a part, as a means of growth in grace, it is not easy adequately to estimate. Meditation is necessary not only as a preparation for prayer, but as entering essentially into the nature of prayer; nay, it is essential to every act of faith; it is the exercise by which the soul digests all the spiritual food which it receives. Moreover, it is of great importance, as tending to promote spiritual economy. How many hours, and days, and years, of the christian's life, are lost, and worse than lost, from the fact that his mind has not been disciplined to a habit of meditation. No inconsiderable part of your whole time is passed in solitude: many of these hours, at least, might be redeemed by meditation, for purposes of religious improvement. You may meditate not in the closet only, but in the field or the work-shop, in the lonely walk or the midnight hour; you may meditate in circumstances in which you can do nothing else; and thus, by this sweet

and silent exercise of the soul, you may keep yourself constantly under a sanctifying influence.

In respect to the duty of *private prayer*, much of what might here naturally be said, has been anticipated in another discourse. Let me only add, that your private addresses at a throne of grace *should be, in a high degree, particular;* and should contemplate even the most minute circumstances of your condition. In social and public prayer, our petitions are necessarily, in some degree, of a general character; as they embrace wants which each individual has, in common with many others. But every christian's experience has something in it peculiar; and not only so, but it is subject to constant variation; and it is in the devotions of the closet alone, that this variety of experience can be distinctly recognized. Endeavor, then, by previous meditation, to gain an accurate knowledge of your necessities and sins, on the one hand, and a deep impression of the mercies which you have received, on the other; and by thus communing with your own heart, you will be prepared for close and particular communion with God. In reviewing a given period, do you find that you have been betrayed into levity of conversation or deportment; or that you have remained silent, where you ought to have dropped a word in behalf of the cause of Christ? Do you find that your thoughts have been wandering on forbidden objects; or that you have yielded to the influence of some evil passion—have indulged in discontent, envy, pride, or revenge; or that, from the want of vigilance, you have been overcome by some sudden temptation? Let all this be a matter of distinct and solemn confession in your closet. Or have you received some signal manifestation of God's kindness in preserving you from temptation, or strengthening you for arduous duties, or imparting new vigor to your religious affections, and thus brightening your hope of heaven? Let these, and all other private blessings, be a subject of devout thanks-

giving in your closet. Or do you find that you have easily besetting sins; or that duties await you, which must involve great self-denial; or that temptations are about to throng upon you, which mere human resolution can never successfully oppose? In the closet you are to seek for grace accommodated to these and all other exigencies of your spiritual condition. In short, here you are to unburden your whole soul with the confidence of a child. You have sins, and sorrows, and wants, which it might be neither desirable nor proper that you should bring before the world: but there is not a sin of which you are guilty, which you are not encouraged here to confess: not a sorrow can agitate your breast, but you may venture here to tell it to a compassionate God: not a want can you feel, but you may here ask with confidence to have it supplied. Let the exercise of private prayer be conducted in the manner which has now been described, and it cannot fail to exert a powerful influence in making you holy. But in proportion as it becomes general—overlooking the more minute circumstances of your condition, it will degenerate into formality, and thus defeat the great end which it is designed to accomplish.

Closely connected with private prayer, as a means of growth in grace, is *reading the scriptures*. "Sanctify them through thy truth," is part of the memorable prayer which our Lord offered in behalf of his disciples, a little before he left the world; and the sentiment which it contains, has been verified in the experience of every christian from that hour down to the present. Not only is the word of God the incorruptible seed of the renewed nature, but it is that from which the spiritual principle derives its nourishment; and accordingly we find that those who have attained the most commanding stature in piety, are those who have drawn most largely from this storehouse of spiritual bounty. But in order that you may realize the benefit which this exercise is adapted to secure, you must read the word of God *with devout and*

earnest attention; for like the food which nourishes the body, it must be digested in order to its being a means of nourishment to the soul. You must read it *as* the word of God; with the most reverent regard for its author; with a firm persuasion that it contains the words of eternal life; and with a conscience lying open to the authority of Him who speaks in it. You must read it *as being addressed particularly to yourself;* must apply what you read for your personal instruction or admonition, as truly as if it had been spoken immediately to you by a voice from Heaven. You must read it with a spirit of *dependence on God, as the author of all holy illumination;* often sending up the prayer—"Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." Read the Bible in this way, my young friends, and while new glories will constantly be unfolding to your delighted vision, as the stars thicken upon the eye at evening; the principle of spiritual life will be continually growing more vigorous, and the evidence of your title to heaven more unquestionable.

In connexion with reading the scriptures, I may mention reading *other books* also, of a serious and practical nature. There are books which are designed immediately to illustrate the meaning, and to exhibit the harmony, of the scriptures. There are other books whose more immediate object is to present a detailed view of the doctrines of the Bible; to show their connexion with each other, and their practical bearings both upon God and man. And there are other books still, which are especially fitted to awaken and cherish a spirit of devotion; to withdraw the soul from the influence of external objects, and bring it to commune with spiritual and invisible realities. Books of either of the kinds to which I have now referred, you may read with much advantage; though you are always to recollect that, as the productions of uninspired men, they are to be tried by the law and the testimony. They are the lesser lights in religion, which borrow all their lustre from the sun.

It deserves here to be remarked, that the different private exercises of which I have spoken, are intimately connected, and are fitted to exert a mutually favorable influence on each other. Meditation, while it composes the mind to a devotional frame, and brings before it subjects for prayer, applies the truths of God's word as means of sanctification. Prayer not only leaves the soul in a state most favorable to meditation, but spreads over the sacred page an illuminating and heavenly influence. Reading the scriptures at once furnishes materials for meditation, and kindles the spirit, while it supplies the language, of prayer. Let these several duties, then, be joined together, so far as possible, in your daily practice; and while each will contribute to render the others more interesting and profitable, they will together exert a powerful influence in your christian improvement.

2. Another important means of growth in grace, is *christian intercourse*. The utility of social intercourse has been felt in every department of knowledge and action. He who desires to make distinguished attainments in any thing, can scarcely fail highly to estimate the society of kindred minds engaged in a similar pursuit; and accordingly we find that some of the most brilliant discoveries in science, have resulted from the intercourse which great minds have had with each other. And as it is with other things, so it is with religion—hardly any thing can serve more effectually to invigorate our religious affections, or to heighten the interest with which we regard the objects of faith, than a close and fraternal intercourse with christian friends; whereas, the neglect of such intercourse is at once a cause, and a symptom, of spiritual declension.

That your intercourse with christian friends may be profitable, let it be *frequent*. Every consideration which should induce you to cultivate this intercourse at all, should induce you to engage in it frequently: and besides, if religion is made the topic of conversation only at

distant intervals, the almost certain consequence will be that such conversation will never awaken much interest, or be prosecuted with much advantage ; whereas, by being frequently introduced, it can hardly fail, through the influence of habit, on the one hand, and an increased degree of religious feeling, on the other, to become a most pleasant and edifying exercise. Let a few christian friends appropriate an hour of each week to the interchange of pious sentiments and feelings, to compare with each other their spiritual progress, and to strengthen each other for their spiritual conflicts, and let this exercise be continued regularly and perseveringly, and you may expect that its influence will be felt in a rapid and vigorous growth of piety. The place of such a meeting will soon come to be regarded as a bethel ; and the hour consecrated to it, will be hailed with devout joy and gratitude. But these are by no means the only seasons in which you should avail yourselves of this privilege. In the common and daily walks of life, there are occasions constantly occurring, on which you may take sweet counsel with your fellow-christians. Why may not the friendly call, and the social interview, instead of being perverted to purposes of idle ceremony, be made subservient to spiritual improvement ? Is it not far more grateful to review an hour passed with a friend in conversing on topics connected with christian experience, or with the kingdom of Christ, than one which you have frittered away in mere trifling intercourse, without having uttered a word worthy of your christian character or christian hopes ? Moreover, this intercourse should be *more or less unreserved*, according to circumstances. I would not, by any means, recommend an indiscriminate disclosure of your religious exercises : this would not only appear to be, but there is reason to fear that it would actually be, the operation of spiritual pride ; than which, nothing can be more offensive either to God or man. As a general direction, I would say that, while you may profitably hold religious

intercourse with *all* christians, that of a more close and confidential kind should ordinarily be confined to intimate friends—those who will at once value and reciprocate your christian confidence. You are, by no means, of course, to decline religious conversation with a christian friend, because there may be those present, who are not interested in it; but you are so far to regard their presence, as to endeavor to give the conversation that direction which shall be most likely to minister to their profit, as well as your own. And finally, I would say that all your religious intercourse ought, so far as possible, to be accompanied or followed by *prayer*. This will serve at once to strengthen the tie that binds your hearts together, to give additional interest to your intercourse, and to draw down upon it the blessing of God. Is it not the melancholy fact that this most delightful duty is often neglected, in the circumstances of which I speak, because it is considered a matter of delicacy? God forbid, my young friends, that you should ever, for a moment, yield to such a sentiment! Surely that is not only false, but criminal delicacy, which, by forbidding you to kneel down with a companion in the christian life at the throne of mercy, would intercept some of the richest blessings of God's grace!

3. I notice as another of the means of growth in grace, the *observance of the sabbath*, in connexion with *public worship*. On this subject, it must be acknowledged that there prevails, extensively, a lamentable deficiency in christian practice. I refer not here to those who openly outrage holy time, by perverting it to worldly business or amusement; they, of course, cut themselves off from every claim to christian character; but I refer rather to those, who, professing to sanctify the sabbath, yet adopt a low standard of duty, and take little pains to exclude the world, either from their thoughts or conversation. That you may avoid this evil, and secure the benefit to be derived from a proper observance of holy time, attend to the following directions.

Make it an object religiously to observe the *whole* sabbath. I do not here attempt to decide the question at what time the sabbath commences: I only insist that your practice on this subject should be consistent with your principles. Whenever you believe the sabbath begins, then begin to observe it; and remember that it is just as criminal to devote the first half hour to secular purposes, as any other part of the day. Let all your worldly concerns be arranged to meet the earliest demands of holy time; that thus you may avoid the wretched practice of suffering the secular business of the week to crowd upon the sacred duties of the sabbath. Be equally careful, on the other hand, that you do not curtail this sacred day, by suffering your spirituality gradually to decline with the sun. I urge this counsel upon you the rather, from the fact that the error to which I refer, so extensively prevails, that you will be in danger of falling into it almost unconsciously. Remember that He who has fixed the stamp of His authority on the sabbath, has left the impress of holiness equally on all its hours. Remember that if you begin the sabbath too late, or close it too early, you are, in either case, guilty of robbing God.

I would, say in the next place, keep the day *strictly holy*. With the low standards of the world on this subject, have nothing to do; remembering that the command of Jehovah is resting upon you, that you should not think your own thoughts, or find your own pleasures. Wherever you are, recollect this command is to be strictly obeyed. What though you may be thrown into the company of those who profane the sabbath; or what though worldly courtesy should seem to claim that you should relax a little from your accustomed strictness, for the sake of making yourself agreeable to irreligious friends —you have no right to listen to any such demands for a moment; and you cannot venture on the experiment of a compliance, but at the hazard of fearfully provoking God, and bringing upon yourself crimson guilt. That you may

comply with the spirit of the divine command, take heed that you *avoid* every thing inconsistent with a devout observance of the day. Never allow yourself in any reading which is not strictly religious. Beware that you do not, from conversing on subjects which have a remote bearing upon religion, slide into conversation of a mere secular character: the temptation to this will sometimes be almost irresistible. Guard against the indulgence of vain and worldly thoughts; for though the eye of man can take no cognizance of these, they fall within the full observation of Him who searches the heart. But in order to keep holy the sabbath, you have much to *perform*, as well as much to avoid. With the exception of what are called "works of necessity and mercy," (and in respect to these, an enlightened conscience is to be the judge,) the whole day is to be devoted to duties strictly religious. Beside attending on the public worship of the sanctuary, (in respect to an absence from which, you are never lightly to admit an excuse,) you are to devote a considerable part of the sabbath to the private exercises of meditation, prayer, and reading the scriptures and other religious books; and some part of it may be profitably spent, as you have opportunity, in serious conversation. It is also an employment perfectly consistent with the sacredness of the day, to communicate religious instruction; and for this, a noble opportunity is presented by sabbath schools. Keeping the sabbath in the manner which I have now described, you may reasonably expect the blessing of the Lord of the sabbath, in a rapid advance in piety.

I have spoken of your attendance on the public worship of God: this is so important a part of the business of the sabbath, as to require distinct consideration. Let me say, then, that you ought always to prepare yourself for this duty by secret prayer; by imploring the divine blessing upon the exercises in which you are to engage, and divine aid to enable you to engage in them with a proper spirit.

On your way to the house of God, let your meditations, and if you converse, your words, be such as to prepare you the better for the solemnities in which you are to mingle; and when you pass the consecrated threshold, realize that you have come hither for no other purposes than to worship God, and listen to his truth. It is no part of your errand here to engage in worldly civilities; or hear worldly news; or count the number of strangers, and prepare to comment upon their appearance. Your business here lies between God and your own souls; and it will never advance, while your attention is absorbed by external objects. Guard then against the idle gaze, and the wandering imagination; make the prayers and the praises which are here offered, your own; let every truth which is here delivered, be applied for your instruction, admonition, or consolation; and feel best satisfied when, on retiring from the sanctuary, your thoughts have been least upon your fellow-mortals, and most upon God. And let not the good impressions which you may have received, be effaced by worldly conversation at the close of the service, or on the way to your dwelling. Decline all conversation which will be likely to exert such an influence, even though it should be solicited; for it is far safer to offend man than God. And avail yourself of the first opportunity to enter your closet, to supplicate the blessing of God to follow the service in which you have been engaged, and to bring home the truths which you have heard more impressively to your own soul. "They who wait upon the Lord" in this manner, "shall renew their strength;" and shall have just occasion to say, "A day in thy courts is better than a thousand."

In connexion with this article, let me direct your attention for a moment, a little more particularly, to your duty in relation to social religious exercises *during the week*. These are never to be elevated to a level with the public services of the sabbath: the latter are prescribed by divine authority; the former are left to the

regulation of human prudence. But so chilling is the atmosphere of the world to religious feeling, that the christian greatly needs the aid which these weekly services are fitted to impart, to keep alive the spirit of devotion. They who fear the Lord will desire not only to speak often one to another, but to unite their hearts in prayer, and to open them to the reception of the truth. While, therefore, you regard such exercises as matter only of christian prudence, you should consider them important helps in the religious life ; and if, at any time, you grow weary of attending them, it will be well to inquire whether there is not a proportional decline in respect to other christian duties. No doubt services of this kind may be multiplied to an improper extent, so as to interfere with duties of paramount claims ; and no doubt they may be rendered unprofitable, and even injurious, by being improperly conducted : at the same time, I am constrained to believe that objections to these services have arisen more frequently from want of religion, than any thing else ; and that the spirit which treats them with contempt, would, if it were armed with power, blot out the sabbath, and bring every institution of God into the dust.

4. The last means of growth in grace which I shall here notice, is *attendance on the Lord's supper.*

That you may receive the benefit which this ordinance is fitted to impart, endeavor to *gain a deep impression of its nature and design.* It is a *commemorating* ordinance ; in which we are to remember " the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, for" our " sakes became poor." It is a *confessing* ordinance ; by which we profess ourselves to be the disciples of Christ, and openly renounce the world as our portion. It is a *communicating* ordinance, in which the blessings of God's grace are communicated for the renovation of our spiritual strength. It is a *covenanting* ordinance ; in which God declares himself our God, and we devote ourselves anew to his service. The more you reflect on the nature and

design of this institution, the more you will discover in it of wisdom and grace ; the more you will derive from it of light, and strength, and comfort.

Endeavor, moreover, to be faithful in your *immediate preparation* for this ordinance. This preparation consists generally in all the private religious exercises of which I have spoken ; but more especially in self-examination. "Let a man examine himself," says the apostle ; "and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." The public service which has been instituted in our churches as preparatory to this ordinance, you are also devoutly and punctually to attend ; and let me say that, if you are voluntarily and habitually absent from that service, you not only wrong your own soul, but carry upon you the mark of a backslider. Cases may indeed occur in which the Lord's table may be spread before you unexpectedly, and in which you have no opportunity for immediate preparation ; and then it is no doubt your duty to partake, and you may hope for the blessing of God. But where preparation is voluntarily neglected, you may expect that the ordinance will be to you a mere dead letter ; and it will be well, if you do not eat and drink judgment to yourself.

In your attendance on the ordinance, be careful that you cherish the *feelings*, which the occasion is adapted and designed to awaken. You should yield yourself to devout *admiration* of that grace, and wisdom, and glory, which shine forth in the plan of redemption, and which seem concentrated around the Redeemer's cross. You are to behold with fervent *gratitude* the amazing sacrifice which constituted the price of all your joys and hopes—the price of your immortal crown. You are to look inward with deep *humility* upon your own sins, as part of the guilty cause of your Redeemer's sufferings. You are to look upward with holy *joy* to a reigning Saviour, and to a bright inheritance. You are to renew your *resolutions* of devotedness to Christ, and to determine in the strength

of his grace, on a course of more unyielding self-denial. You are to cherish the spirit of *brotherly love* towards your fellow-christians, and a spirit of *good will* towards the whole family of man; and you are to let your benevolent affections go out in fervent prayer for the revival of God's work. Thus you are to wait upon the Lord at his table; but that you may not, after all, defeat the design of your attendance, carry the spirit of the ordinance back with you to your closet, and there let it be fanned into a still brighter flame. Carry it with you into the world, into scenes of care and temptation, and let it certify to all with whom you associate that you have been with Jesus.

III. I proceed to the third and last division of the discourse, in which I am briefly to illustrate the *importance of growth in grace.*

1. Growth in grace is important, as constituting the only *satisfactory evidence of piety.*

I well know that there is a tendency in the backslider and self-deceiver to be perpetually recurring to past experience. When they are rebuked, as they cannot fail sometimes to be, by the consciousness of being far from God and from duty, they call to mind the days in which they were cheered, as they suppose, by the manifestations of the Saviour's love; and by connecting experience at best equivocal in its character, and long since gone by, with a sad perversion of the doctrine of the saints' perseverance, they arrive at the welcome conclusion that, though fallen from their first love, they have yet the love of God in their hearts. Beware, my young friends, of this delusion. The christian character is, in its very nature, progressive. If then you make no sensible progress in piety—much more if you are on the decline, and have suffered your affections to become wedded to the world, you have no right, from your past experience, to take the comfort of believing that this is only the occa-

sional lapse of a child of God, from which his grace is pledged to bring you back: you have reason rather to conclude that you have been resting upon the hypocrite's hope, and that you are yet in your sins. But if, on the other hand, the principle of religion in your heart is constantly gaining strength, then you have evidence on which you may confidently rely, that you have been born of God. The grain of mustard seed, when cast into the earth, is so small as almost to elude observation; but when it shoots up into a tree, and gradually lifts its boughs towards heaven, no one doubts the reality of its existence. In like manner, the principle of religion, when first implanted in the heart, is so feeble, that even its existence may be a matter of question; but as it gathers strength, and advances towards maturity, the evidence of its reality becomes decisive.

2. Growth in grace is important, as constituting the only *solid ground of comfort*. We have already seen that it constitutes the only satisfactory evidence of piety. But without evidence of piety, you have no right to indulge the *hope* of heaven: and without that hope, where in the universe will you look for comfort? If you do not grow in grace, you must either be sunk in spiritual lethargy, or else you must be occasionally at least harrowed with fearful apprehensions in respect to the future; and who will say that either situation has any thing in it that deserves the name of enjoyment. If, on the other hand, you grow in grace, you have, with the evidence of piety which is thus gained, a right to hope that you are an heir to the glories of the upper world. Is there any thing in this hope that is transporting? As you value its consolations, grow in grace.

Moreover, the growing christian finds comfort not only in the hope of heaven, but in *the daily exercise of the christian graces;* but if you do not grow in grace, you have not more to expect from this latter source of comfort than from the former. In the exercise of love to God,

and faith in the Saviour, and many other christian graces —yes, even in the successful struggles of the soul with sin, there is sometimes a joy which mounts up to ecstacy. But to all this the sluggish and backslidden christian (for such, at best, must he be who is not growing in grace,) is, of course, a stranger. He cannot have the comfort of the christian graces, because he has not the exercise of them. Grow in grace, then, as you would avoid the languor and apathy of spiritual declension, on the one hand, and as you would rejoice in the inward experience of God's love, on the other.

3. Growth in grace is important, as constituting the only *pledge of religious action*. I am well aware that many actions externally good, and fitted to exert a benign influence on the world, are performed by men whose hearts have never been touched by a sanctifying influence: there are broad and deep streams of public charity, flowing from fountains into which the salt of divine grace has never been cast. Thanks to that Providence which has ordained that it should be so; which causes bad men sometimes to do good; laying under contribution their hands, even while they withhold their hearts. But who does not perceive that in all cases of this kind, there is not—cannot be, a pledge for continued exertion in the cause of Christ? As there is no love to that cause, whence shall come that constraining influence, which shall nerve the hands for unrelaxed and persevering effort? Who can feel any assurance that the person who serves God to-day, by his property or his influence, from merely selfish motives, will not to-morrow, upon a change of circumstances, become a persecutor of the faith which he now labors to promote?

Far otherwise is it with the person, who lives in the growing exercise of grace. With him, to do good is a matter of principle; and in every variety of circumstances, it is the business of his life. Do you fear that he will

grow weary of well-doing? Never, so long as he continues to grow in grace; for it is only the outward operation of the inward principle. Place him in circumstances the most unfavorable to benevolent action; let him, for his master's sake, be shut out from the light of heaven, and chained in dreary solitude, where he can have no access to a human being—and is his benevolent influence no longer exerted? I tell you, Nay: That man is doing good even in his dungeon: he has in his breast a principle whose operations no tyrant can check, and no dungeon confine: though his communication with the visible world is cut off, he has communion with the invisible God; and the influence of his prayers may not only change his dark abode into a habitation for the Most High, but may carry the blessings of God's grace to many souls. Cultivate, then, this holy principle, that yours may be a life not only of sincere, but of persevering benevolence; and that it may hereafter be said of you, as of your Master, that you went about doing good.

4. Growth in grace is important, as constituting the only *adequate preparation for heaven*. You hope you have been renewed in the temper of your mind: but even if you are not deceived in this hope, you cannot be insensible that there is much of corruption still lodged in your heart; and that a mighty change is yet to take place in your character, before you are prepared to inhabit the regions of perfect purity. You still sometimes feel the risings of a spirit of rebellion: sometimes you are brought under the power of evil affections; and not unfrequently, when your soul would rise to heaven in pious contemplation, it is weighed down to the dust by the most oppressive sluggishness. But this spirit of rebellion, and these evil affections, and this oppressive sluggishness, you can never carry with you to heaven: hence the necessity of growing in grace, that you may be prepared for heaven. But do you say that eternal life is promised to all who

have been renewed ; and that, die when they will, God will see to it that they are completely sanctified ? Be it so—but let it not be forgotten that, in the ordinary course of his providence, He accomplishes this object by bringing them to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. And besides, though there is a pledge that all the regenerate shall be received to heaven, yet the measure of their joy in that happy world is to be proportioned to their present attainments. Wouldst thou then, christian, be ready for thine entrance into rest ; wouldst thou aspire to a place in heaven near thy Redeemer, where the beams of his glory shall illuminate thy soul with brightest effulgence, then, grow in grace ; press forward to the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Let me, in the conclusion of this discourse, my young friends, impress upon you, in one word, the importance of aiming at high attainments in religion. Whether you are to be a sluggish or an active christian ; whether you are to cheer the region around you by the light of a holy example, or to be a stumbling block in the path of sinners, depends much on the resolutions which you now form, and the course which you now adopt. Oh resolve—and supplicate God's grace to enable you to execute the resolution—that you will exemplify the character of a constantly growing christian. Make all your worldly employments subordinate, and, so far as possible, subservient to your progress in piety. Think yourself more happy when you have gained the victory over a besetting sin, than if you should see an empire at your feet. Let nothing allure you—let nothing drive you, from the straight and narrow path of duty. If the world should come and court you with its smiles, turn your back upon it, or meet it only as a tempter. If it should cast its chilling frown upon you, and call your zeal enthusiasm, and your devotion hypocrisy, remember that it is enough for the disciple

that he be as his master. Be it your grand object to become a perfect person in Christ Jesus. Keep your eye steadily fixed on heaven, as the eagle's eye fastens upon the sun ; and let your spirit constantly press upward, as the eagle's wing lifts itself towards the orb of day.

LECTURE XVI.

DOING GOOD.

GALATIANS VI. 10.

LET US DO GOOD UNTO ALL MEN.

In this brief exhortation, the spirit of the gospel comes out with unrivalled beauty: it is an index pointing away from earth to heaven, as the region whence this treasure of light and love was sent down to men. How different is the spirit of the gospel from the spirit of the world! The one is selfish: the other, noble. The one breathes good wishes and kind words: the other prompts to substantial acts. The one is limited to a circle which private interest marks out: the other, in its comprehensive range, takes in the world, and calls every man a brother. What youth, especially what christian youth, would not desire that this spirit might have a permanent lodgement in his heart;—controlling his actions, forming his character, elevating his destiny?

It is of great importance, my young friends, that, at the very commencement of your religious life, you should not only be deeply impressed with the fact that the great purpose for which you are to live is to do good, but also that you should form your plans, and direct your efforts, in such a manner as to accomplish the greatest amount of good in your power. Many a person who has been brought into the kingdom of Christ early in life, has sadly disappointed the hopes which have

been formed in respect to his usefulness, merely from having made a wrong estimate of his own powers, or from having unwisely selected his sphere of action, or from having plunged, as it were, at random, into the duties of life, conscious of his own good intentions, and presuming that they could scarcely fail to be fulfilled. With a view to guard you against any such mistakes, and to secure to yourselves and the world the full benefit of your early conversion, I bring before you to-day, the comprehensive subject which my text suggests—that of DOING GOOD: and I will endeavor to present it under the four following divisions:—

I. *The field for doing good:*
II. *Means of doing good:*
III. *Directions for doing good:* And,
IV. *Motives for doing good:*

I. What is *the field* in which, as christians, you are called to labor? In other words, *to whom* are you required to do good?

I answer, in general, *the field is the world:* you are to do good unto *all* men.

There are those who limit the sphere of their beneficence to *their own families or kindred.* To their own children they are even profuse in offices of kindness; and not only do for them all which their necessities require, but grant them many indulgences which their best interests forbid. In the circle of their immediate friends, also, they seem to delight in diffusing happiness, and sometimes they may do this, even to their own personal inconvenience. But bring before them the wants of a stranger—much more of an enemy—and they are deaf as adders to every claim you can urge upon their compassion. Their sympathy and their charity are all expended at home: they never go abroad in search of objects of distress: they even pass unheeded the suffering stranger who lies at their door.

Exactly the opposite of this, is the course which christianity marks out, and which, as the disciples of Christ, you are bound to pursue. You are indeed permitted by the gospel (for it is the dictate of nature) to cherish towards your family and kindred a peculiar affection; and it *may be* proper that they should occupy the first place in your beneficent regards; but you have no right, and if you are a christian, you have no disposition, to limit your benevolent acts to them. Nor have you any right to refuse such acts even to an enemy; nay, the fact that he is an enemy, may impose upon you the stronger obligations to do him good: for not only is he a brother, as a member of the human family, but if he is an enemy to you, and cherishes towards you malevolent feelings, not improbably he is also an enemy to God, and as such, claims your best efforts for his salvation. Hear the language of our great Master on this subject: "But I say unto you, love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you."

There are those, again, (and I here refer especially to persons in the higher walks of life,) whose sphere of benevolent action is limited to *those of the same rank with themselves*. To the rich and the great, who stand least in need of their favors, their hearts and their hands seem always to be open; and even to real objects of charity who are invested with the dignity of rank, they may give liberally: but if you go around among the poor, and the friendless, and the houseless, who have nothing but their misery to recommend them, you will find yourself in a region which the charity of which I am speaking has never condescended to explore, and amidst sufferings with which it could have no communion. Let there be some great enterprise set on foot, which will be blazoned abroad to excite the admiration of the world, and these persons will be forward to iden-

tify themselves with it, by contributing liberally to its advancement; but as for the more humble and every day objects of charity, they have neither a heart to feel, nor a hand to give.

Not so with the benevolence of the gospel. That is not only active, but unostentatious and humble. It disdains not to go into the haunts of wretchedness, and to search out the children of want and wo, and to minister to the relief of the most abject, and even of the most depraved. And after having gone into the dark retreats of misery, it does not go out into the world, to chaunt its own praises, but goes back to the closet, to ask God's blessing on the deeds of mercy which it has performed, satisfied that only one record of them should be kept, and that in heaven. If you would see precisely what I mean, brought out into living action, you have it in the illustrious Howard, who flew through Europe like an angel of mercy, not repelled but attracted by the contagion and loathsomeness of hospitals and dungeons; and who has left behind him a track of glory, which grows brighter the longer he sleeps in his grave. His was the genuine benevolence of the gospel;—doing good for the sake of doing good;—energetic, self-denying, quick in its operations as the lightning; and yet unostentatious, seeking no man's applause, and caring for no earthly reward.

There are those again, whose range of benevolent exertion does not extend beyond *a sect or a party*. In this narrow sphere, they are willing to labor, and perhaps to labor diligently; they are willing to give, and perhaps to give liberally. And, at first view, you might think they were full of the benevolence of the gospel. But if you look a little farther, you will find that these people are Jews, and all who do not belong to their party are Samaritans. Let an object of charity be proposed to them, and the first inquiry is, "is it likely to subserve the interests of the sect or party to which I belong?" and the answer to this question decides the course they adopt in

respect to it. The object may be one in which the interests of the community at large are deeply involved; but this is a consideration lighter than air with a person who is shut up within the narrow limits of a sect.

True christian benevolence knows no such limits. You could no more trammel her by sectarian peculiarities, than you could arrest the progress of light, or chain a giant with a cobweb. Instead of stopping at the line which divides one denomination of christians from another, as if she were arrested by a flaming sword, she walks over that line every day, and breathes as freely on one side as on the other. What though a man may be a heretic in religion, and bearing the christian name, may still have renounced the christian faith; she regards him just as he is; she does not receive him to her bosom as a christian, but she pities and prays for him as an errorist, and does her utmost to reclaim him from his wanderings. All who are fundamentally right, she receives into the arms of christian fellowship: to all the rest she delights to do good, as God gives opportunity.

I observe, once more, that there are those whose benevolence is limited to *their own country*. It may be they have bright visions of their country's future glory; and their bosoms kindle at the thought that she is marching towards a nobler destiny than awaits any other of the nations. And when plans for her aggrandizement are brought forward, whether they are connected immediately with politics or religion, they stand forward as their advocates; and whether it be personal exertion or pecuniary contribution that is demanded, the demand is met with commendable promptness. But suppose there be a project of benevolence presented, as wide as the world; a project in which one's own country is recognised only as a single member in a great family;—and it is met with chilling apathy; and it is faced with a thousand objections: and its advocates not improbably are called enthusiasts or madmen. Here again, the flame of benevo-

lence burns brightly within certain limits; but beyond those limits, it goes out in the chillness of the grave.

Christian benevolence, on the other hand, literally embraces the world. He who has been touched with the true spirit of the gospel, remembers that men of other countries, as truly as of his own, have souls and bodies to be provided for;—wants to be supplied, and miseries to be relieved; and he does not, he cannot, refuse his aid to any project for doing good, because it may be intended to operate beyond the sphere of his immediate observation. He has his eye fixed on the moral regeneration of the world; and he does not regard any contribution, whether of influence or money, as to no purpose, which has a bearing, however remote, upon this grand object. Hence, while he is the active promoter of missions at home, he labors also to advance the cause of missions abroad; and the news of the triumphs of the gospel from the distant islands of the sea, gladdens his heart as truly as if it had come from his own immediate neighborhood.

Thus you see, my young friends, that the field which you are called to occupy in doing good, is literally *the world:* that is, you are to include all men in your benevolent regards, and are actually to do good to all men, so far as you have opportunity.

II. Let me now, secondly, call your attention to some of the most important *means* of doing good. On a subject of so great extent, I must necessarily confine myself to mere hints.

It may be proper, however, before I proceed to specify particular means of doing good, to observe that these means are not all equally fitted to every individual; or rather, some of them may be employed with greater effect by some individuals than by others; owing to an original difference of character, or to a difference of providential allotments. All of them, however, may, by

most, or all of you, be employed, in a greater or less degree: the comparative importance which you are to attach to each, or the principle by which you are to be governed in your selection, will come into view in a subsequent article of this discourse.

I remark, then,

1. In the first place, that one important means of doing good, is *private conversation.*

In the circle of your acquaintance, and probably in the circle of your intimate friends, there are many young persons, who are living in the neglect, perhaps the open contempt, of religion. With some of them, it may be, you have been associated in a habit of carelessness, and possibly may have contributed your influence to render them insensible to their immortal interests. Now, these especially are the persons, toward whose salvation your private efforts are to be directed. You are indeed to address yourself to this duty with prudence; not in a manner to excite disgust, but, if possible, to secure a favorable and listening regard; nevertheless, you may, you ought, to make a serious and earnest effort to impress them with their guilt and danger, and to bring them to escape from the wrath to come. Or it may be that some with whom you have intercourse, are actually awakened to a sense of religion, and are oppressed with the burden of unpardoned sin, and are agitating the momentous question—"what they must do to be saved." You may do good—good beyond the power of human calculation—by pressing upon such persons the obligations of repentance, and faith, and holiness; by admonishing them of the danger of resisting the influences of the Holy Spirit; by taking them by the hand, as it were, and leading them into the kingdom. All this you may do in the ordinary intercourse of private friendship, without either being, or seeming to be, officious or obtrusive; and for aught you can tell, you may, by such instrumentality, save souls from death, and hide a multitude of sins.

Moreover, you may do good by private conversation, not only to those who are strangers to the power of religion, but also to christians, and especially to christians at your own period of life. You may see among your companions, some who are beginning to grow unmindful of their christian obligations, and seem to have entered on a course of backsliding. You may do immense good, by meeting them at the threshold of their decline, with an affectionate and faithful admonition: you may not only do good to them, but prevent a vast amount of evil to the cause of Christ. And to those of your christian companions who are watchful and exemplary, you may do good, by encouraging them in acts of self-denial, by cherishing in their bosoms a spirit of devotion, by provoking them to love and good works. Especially, you may avail yourself of your intercourse with them, to devise plans for the moral and spiritual benefit of your fellow-men, or to encourage and assist them in carrying such plans into effect. In short, all your private intercourse with your companions, whether they be christians or not, may, if rightly conducted, minister, either directly or indirectly, to the promotion of their best interests.

2. Another efficient means of doing good is furnished by the opportunity of *instructing in the sabbath school.* This I know may be considered as belonging to the great system of benevolent operations, of which I design to speak more particularly under the next article: but it is of so much importance, and withal, belongs so appropriately to young christians, that I cannot forbear to give it a distinct consideration.

Though the sabbath school institution is yet comparatively in its infancy, it has been too long in existence to require, especially before the youth of this congregation, that its claims should be formally set forth. But I speak in accordance with my most deliberate convictions, when I say that you can scarcely employ a more efficient means of doing good than this institution furnishes; none which

will tell more loudly or more gloriously on the destinies of individuals, on the destiny of our country, or on the destiny of the world. When you sit down in the sabbath school room, with a few children around you, you may seem to those who look on, and possibly you may seem to yourself, to be accomplishing but little : but rely on it, the results of what you are doing, as they will be seen in the light of eternity, will surprise you : the influence which you exert there, may not improbably be felt through your city, and even through your country, and no mortal can say at what point, either of time or place, it will be arrested. If I were called upon to say what feature in the present age is most favorable to the benevolent activity of christian youth, I should unhesitatingly refer to the fact that it is an age of sabbath schools ; and I am sure that none of you whose heart has been touched by the benevolence of the gospel, will be willing to lose the opportunity of doing good which is hereby afforded.

Let me say, then, my young friends, let the sabbath school come in for a large share of your active regard and support. Instead of regarding it a task, regard it a privilege, to engage in it. And that your labors may turn to the best account, qualify yourselves thoroughly for the discharge of your duty ; endeavor to impart, in connexion with each exercise, all the instruction you can ; aim not only to enlighten the understanding, but to impress the heart ; and follow up every good impression with pious and affectionate counsels, which may be fitted to render it abiding. Consider yourselves as entrusted in a measure with the best interests of your pupils ; and let all your efforts be directed, if possible, to secure their salvation. I rejoice that so many of you are already enlisted in this benevolent, this godlike enterprise ; enlisted in it, I trust, with a degree of ardor, in some measure proportioned to its importance.

3. You have another important means of doing good, in *the great system of benevolent operations* by which the present day is distinguished. The institutions which have grown up during the present age, for the diffusion of christian light, and the consequent melioration of the character and condition of man, bespeak a new and better era of the world; and they put into the hands of every one, and especially of every youth, facilities for doing good, which the wise and virtuous of other ages have desired without having enjoyed. This, unquestionably, is the great moral machinery by which the world is to be evangelized; and there is not one of you who may not, who ought not, and I think I may say, who will not, in some way or other, put forth his hand to keep this machinery in operation.

You may aid this great cause, in the first place, by *personal exertion*. In sustaining and carrying forward these various institutions, there is a demand for much sober calculation, for much judicious management, for much zealous and faithful co-operation; and that, whether you consider each institution as insulated, or as making part of a great system of benevolent operation. Here is a field in which you may tax your faculties to the utmost, and which you cannot occupy with success, without more or less of intellectual effort. But beside the exertion necessary to guide and control these institutions, there is also a demand for a spirit of enterprise in extending their operation, and in enlisting a greater amount of influence in their favor. You may, by suitable measures, bring other youth who have hitherto stood aloof, to engage in the same great cause; and they, in their turn, may influence others; and so any one of you, for aught you can tell, may give a new impulse to the benevolent operations of a neighborhood, or even of a city.

And you may help forward the same great cause also, by your *pecuniary contributions*. I do not undertake to

prescribe the amount which any one shall give; nevertheless, I will venture to say, Give as the Lord has prospered you: give as an enlightened and well regulated conscience dictates: give as you believe the object will appear to have demanded, when you shall see it in the light of the judgment day. If you are rich, you can give much: if you have only a competence, you can do less: if you are comparatively poor, you can do something: and God, both by his word and providence, assures you that what you give shall not make you the poorer. It is a noble resolution which some young persons have formed, to consecrate a certain part of their earnings to God in the promotion of his cause; and this resolution, to their honor, they have been enabled to keep, even though they have been prospered beyond all their expectations. The world is not to be evangelized without an immense amount of pecuniary contribution; and as you desire that glorious result, and as you desire to be instrumental in bringing it forward, you cannot but esteem it a privilege to contribute of your substance according to your several ability.

4. Another important means of doing good, which is fairly within the reach of all of you, is a *holy example.* There is a power in a consistent, devoted, christian life, which belongs to nothing else; and which greatly increases the power of each particular effort that you may put forth. For instance, you may talk much on the subject of religion, and occasionally manifest a deep interest in it, and yet it will be to little purpose, if your general deportment be not in correspondence with your conversation; whereas, on the other hand, a uniformly holy example will give to the same conversation, a point and energy not easily resisted. So also you may engage actively in the promotion of benevolent objects, and may bring large gifts to the treasury of the Lord, and if this is not of a piece with your daily walk, instead of stimulating others to nobler deeds of charity, it is not impro-

bable that the charge of ostentation will be made behind your back, if it is not rung in your ears. But beside the influence which a holy example exerts in giving effect to individual acts of beneficence, there is a more general and more direct influence, which may be calculated upon with absolute certainty. A devoted life addresses itself, silently indeed, but most powerfully, to persons of every description. To the careless sinner, and to the slumbering christian, it brings reproof and admonition. To those who are awakened to the importance of religion, it proffers a most persuasive invitation to comply with the terms of the gospel. And to those who are actively engaged in doing their Master's business, it holds out encouragement to increased activity and perseverance. In short, a true christian example is a living epistle, known and read of all men.

To this point, then, let me entreat you, my young friends, to give diligent heed. See that your conversation be, in all respects, as becometh the gospel of Christ. See that the spirit of piety shed its kindly influence over your whole life. In whatever circumstances you are placed, exhibit the humility, the consistency, the dignified firmness, that belongs to the christian character. I exhort you to this now, not as a matter of comfort, but as a matter of usefulness; as a means of doing good; and I repeat, that there is in the christian life, a power over the hearts and consciences of men, of the extent of which you have probably never conceived. And if this is true of the christian life in *any* circumstances, suffer me to say that it is especially true of it when it is exhibited by *the young*. Let an elevated tone of piety appear in a young christian; let him be at once humble, active, and consistent; and he will diffuse around him a light, which, perhaps, beyond almost any other, will lead men to glorify our Father who is in heaven.

5. The last of the means of doing good which I shall here specify, is *prayer*. In a preceding discourse, I have

spoken of its importance as a means of growth in grace: I now remark, that it is not less important as a means of doing good. The kind of prayer to which I here especially refer, is of course, *intercession*.

I stop not now to inquire in respect to the nature of the connexion between asking and receiving: it is sufficient for us to know that there *is* such a connexion;—that God has commanded us to ask, and has promised, if we ask aright, that we shall receive. And he is as ready to hear the prayers which we offer in behalf of others, as of ourselves. Not that every prayer we offer will be answered in the very manner, and at the very time, which we may expect or desire; still it is true, literally true, that praying breath is never spent in vain; and we shall ultimately know that all our prayers offered with faith in the Saviour, have been answered in the best manner possible;—in the way which infinite wisdom and goodness has dictated.

In some respects, you will instantly perceive that prayer *possesses an advantage over every other* means of doing good. It is a means which you may employ with its full effect, when you are unable to employ any other. Perhaps you have an irreligious friend, who has steadily resisted all your efforts for his salvation; who has even treated your affectionate counsels and expostulations with contempt, insomuch that you have become satisfied that you have done all for him in that way that you can ever do:—must you then absolutely give him up, and sit down with the heart-rending reflection that he must certainly perish? No: you may enter your closet, and on his behalf, commune with your Father who seeth in secret; and there perhaps, when all other means have failed, you may prevail with God to create within him a clean heart. Or you may be laid in the providence of God upon a sick bed; and you may think with deep concern of the salvation of sinners around you, and yet be unable to reach them with the

voice of expostulation; or you may think of the noble institutions of christian charity which bless our land, and yet be too poor to contribute a farthing to aid their operation; but in either case, you can wield the most powerful engine that God has put into the hands of mortals; and it may be that you will actually accomplish more on that bed of sickness, than many around you who have health, and property, and a profusion of the means of active benevolence. And then again, let it not be forgotten, that unless all your other efforts to do good are crowned with prayer, you have no assurance that they will be of any avail: or if they should, by God's grace, be made instrumental of good to others, they will bring no blessings into your own bosom. And let me say too, that the spirit of prayer is the spirit of beneficence; and it is in the closet, in the worshipping assembly, and universally at a throne of grace, that the christian's heart is quickened to its highest impulse of benevolent action.

I say then, my young friends, pray without ceasing. Pray in season, and out of season. Pray for your friends, and your enemies. Pray for those who are near at hand, and those who are afar off. Pray for the whole family of man. Pray with deep humility, with true faith, with earnest perseverance, and you shall know, probably in this world, if not, at the judgment, that in these importunate wrestlings, you were doing a greater amount of good to the souls of your fellow-men, than you have the power to calculate;—perhaps, that you were clothing the wilderness with moral verdure, and causing the dark places of the earth to echo with the sounds of salvation.

I have now specified some of the most important means of doing good; means which, in a greater or less degree, are within the reach of all of you. Let me here only add, that your *worldly calling*, whatever it may be, ought to be regarded by you in the same light;—as an

important means of benefiting your fellow-men. In whatever sphere Providence may call you to labor, you are to bear in mind that your efforts are not to terminate in mere self-gratification, but are to have respect to the higher purposes of doing good to others, and of glorifying God.

III. I proceed to the third general division of the discourse, in which I am to suggest some *directions* for doing good.

1. In the first place, then, if you desire to accomplish the greatest amount of good, I would say, *Be careful to select a field adapted to your peculiar talents.* This remark may apply in general to the choice of your calling for life; or it may apply more particularly to special enterprises of benevolence in which you may engage. There are a great variety of stations and employments allotted to men, in any of which the true christian, if otherwise fitted for them, cannot fail to be useful. But it is easy to conceive that a christian, with certain natural or acquired talents, might be very useful in one station, when he would be little more than a cumberer of the ground in another. Hence the vast importance of judiciously selecting your employments; of always occupying those places which you are fitted to occupy with the greatest advantage; of using those means for doing good, which are likely, in your hands, to be most efficacious. It is true, indeed, that this is a subject on which you may not always be able to form the most correct opinion; for there is no kind of knowledge in which we are more apt to be deficient, than the knowledge of our own character: but if you are prudent, you will not only look well into your own hearts, but will take counsel of judicious christian friends, who will be able to judge with less partiality, and probably with more correctness. Entering a sphere of labor for which you are fitted, you may accomplish

more in a short period, than, in other circumstances, you could accomplish during a whole life.

There is one *common mistake* connected with this subject, to which I beg leave to advert for the sake of putting you on your guard against it, if, perchance, it should, with any of you, become a practical matter. I refer to the fact that young men, not unfrequently, from conscientious considerations, leave a profession to which they have been trained, and for which they are fitted, for one to which they have neither a natural or acquired adaptation. Far be it from me to question that there may be cases in which a mechanic, or a merchant, or a lawyer, may very properly resign the trade or the profession to which he has been educated, and even at a comparatively late period, enter the gospel ministry; but I am constrained to offer it as my deliberate conviction that, in the great majority of instances in which such a change takes place, it is not for the better, but for the worse, as it respects the amount of good ultimately accomplished. Admitting that the calling to which the individual is first devoted, is honest and honorable, and one to which he has been regularly trained, he had, in all ordinary cases, better remain in it; for if he enter another, especially if he enter the gospel ministry, it will probably be with at best a hurried preparation, and in circumstances which give little promise of success. If you have found by experience that you can occupy one place to advantage, there is always some hazard in relinquishing it for another which you have not tried, of a very different character. And you misjudge altogether, if you imagine that the christian ministry opens the only extensive field of usefulness to a christian: for it admits of no question that there are many good men, who can be far more useful out of the ministry than in it. I do not decide that in a case like that which I have supposed, you ought not to change; but I say with confidence, that you ought not to do it without much deliberation and prayer.

2. Another direction necessary to be observed, if you will accomplish the greatest amount of good in your power, is, that, *so far as may be, your whole time should be occupied in doing good.* I should not be surprised, if the query should arise in some of your minds, whether this is indeed possible; whether it is not necessary, from the very constitution of our nature, that part of our time should be devoted to amusement? I answer, the constitution of our nature does require an occasional cessation from severe labor, and an occasional change of employment; but it does not require that it should be a change from what is useful to what is useless, or foolish: on the contrary, the whole purpose—the only legitimate purpose of amusement, is answered by a change from one useful employment to another; an employment which keeps you still doing good, though you are doing good in a different way. If you govern your conduct by this principle, you will find yourselves blessed with a far higher degree of activity both of mind and body, and will be far better fitted for the discharge of your ordinary duties, than if you should yield yourselves up to absolute inaction, or to what ordinarily passes with the world under the name of amusement. In this way, too, many of your precious moments which would otherwise be lost, and worse than lost, are improved to the benefit of your fellow-men, and the glory of God.

3. If you would do all the good in your power, *reduce your various duties, so far as possible, to system.* Every man of the world knows how necessary this is in the accomplishment of *his* purposes: and it is equally necessary for the man, who, whatever he does, aims to do all to the glory of God. You ought to regard this as a matter of christian obligation, not only in respect to whatever relates to your daily employment, but to your efforts for the promotion of particular objects of benevolence, and especially to your pecuniary contributions. Let the plan by which you are to regulate your whole conduct, be

formed in your closet: let it be formed deliberately; in the exercise of a spirit of prayer; with a deep sense of your christian obligations; and in view of the retributions of the judgment: and that plan reduced to practice, will, on the whole, bring a much larger amount of blessing in its train, than any course of conduct which should be left to the control of accidental circumstances and occasional impulses. I do not say but that, in the latter case, you might sometimes do more, and give more, from the momentary impulse of excited feeling, than in the former: but in the one case, your influence would be like that of a summer shower—rattling, soon over, and not penetrating beyond the surface of the earth; in the other, it would be like that of a steady rain—comparatively noiseless, but sinking deep into the earth, and causing it to minister to the wants of man.

Suffer me to say, my young friends, that if you intend ever to regulate your efforts in doing good by a regard to system, *you cannot begin too early.* I know not whether there be any one habit which is broken up with more difficulty, than a habit of action which has no respect to order; and such a habit persisted in for a few years, if we may judge from the analogy of experience, must be pronounced nearly incurable. As you desire, then, not only to do the greatest amount of good, but to do it with the greatest ease and pleasure, I exhort you to lose no time in forming a habit of systematic action.

4. It is also important, in order that you may do the greatest good in your power, that *your efforts should be proportioned to different objects, according to their claims on your regard.* Two objects may be equally important in themselves, and yet the one, from peculiar circumstances, may have a much stronger claim on *your* attention than the other: for instance, the members of your own family, or the circle of your immediate friends, have no doubt a stronger claim on your benevolent exertions, than the inhabitants of Japan or Hindostan; not because

the souls of your kindred or friends are more precious than the souls of these heathen, but because Providence has placed the former more immediately within the range of your influence. Not that you are to refuse your aid for the salvation of those who are afar off; for you have already seen that your field of operation is the world: nevertheless, as a general rule, you are to regard those who are near you, other things being equal, as having stronger claims than the more distant, on the principle to which I have just adverted. Of the various objects of real benevolence which are presented to you, I do not advise you to turn away from any which you have the ability to aid; but I exhort you to let the comparative aid which you render to each, be a matter of reflection and prayer. An object in itself less important, may, sometimes, from peculiar circumstances, demand, for the time being, more of your aid, than a more important one; but in general, the relative importance of the object, in connexion with the providential relation you sustain to it, is to be the criterion by which you are to determine your duty.

5. I observe, once more, that if you would do the greatest amount of good in your power, *you must watch for the most favorable seasons for action.* You know how important this is to the merchant, and indeed to men of every profession: the improvement of a single opportunity, the taking advantage of a slight turn of circumstances, may be the hinge on which turns their fortune for life. Let not the children of this world, my young friends, be wiser in their generation than the children of light. Be always on the watch for opportunities of doing good; lest, while your vigilance is suspended for an hour, some opportunity should escape you, which, by having been faithfully improved, might have secured the salvation of some immortal soul. Be ready at all times to speak a word in season for God: I say, a word *in season;* for while I desire that you may be faithful on this sub-

ject, I would never have you disgust by being inappropriate and obtrusive: but "a word fitly spoken," that is, spoken in the right time, and in the right manner, the wise man has declared, "is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." So also you may sometimes do incalculable good by a tract, and that too in circumstances in which you could do good in no other way: and who does not know that, by this means, a reproof has sometimes been brought home to the heart of the scoffer, which has melted him down into a penitent at the foot of the cross? In a word, let it be your object, while you are always engaged in doing good, to avail yourselves especially of those golden seasons which now and then occur, in which you may accomplish great good, perhaps in a single moment; opportunities which, if once suffered to pass, can never be recalled.

IV. I have already dwelt at so great length on this subject, that I shall detain you but a few moments upon the last article, in which I am to consider the *motives* for doing good: though this of itself constitutes a subject so broad, that, instead of occupying a small part of a discourse, it might profitably occupy several discourses.

1. The first motive which I would present before you for doing good, is, that, *in this way only, you answer the end of your existence.* A moment's inspection of your intellectual and moral constitution, shows you that you are gifted with noble powers; powers which could have been bestowed only by the Almighty and All-wise God. The question arises, Whence, then, were they bestowed? Was it that they might be perverted to purposes of rebellion and crime? Such an inquiry needs no reply. Was it then that they might merely answer the purposes of self-indulgence; or that they should remain in a state of indolent inaction? To admit this, were not only absurd, but blasphemous. You need go to no higher teachers than reason and conscience, to be assured that these noble

powers were given you for benevolent action; and that when they are used in any other way, or for any other purpose, they are perverted. Man was made for a far higher purpose than the beasts that perish; but if his faculties are employed in any other way than in doing good, he loses the place in creation which his Maker assigned him, and becomes worse than a blank in the works of God. I know that this is a motive which addresses itself to youth of every character—to those who utterly neglect religion, as well as to those who have entered on a religious life: but I am sure it applies in all its force to you who are professedly the disciples of Christ; for to say nothing of the fact that you may be deceived, it is certain that you bear about with you a body of sin, and hence are in danger of doing far less good than is actually within your power; and just in proportion as you come short of this, you defeat the design for which your faculties, your very existence, was given you. As you desire then to answer, in the highest degree, the end for which God made you, and made you what you are in the scale of being, be always employed in doing good.

2. Another motive by which I would urge you to a life of active benevolence, is, *that your destiny thereby becomes allied to that of the highest orders of creation.* No doubt there are various ranks of being above us, as we know that there are various orders below us; and with the exception of the rebel angels who are confined in chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day, all these superior orders of intelligence are engaged in a course of unceasing, active benevolence. They breathe the pure atmosphere of Heaven: they walk in the light of the Lamb: they execute the purposes of infinite wisdom and infinite love: they strike their golden harps to the praises of Jehovah. By a life of active benevolence, you become incorporated into the same family with them, and prepared for their communion and their joys. Nay, more, your destiny, in some respects, will be ele-

vated above theirs; for the song of redemption you will raise to a higher and nobler note than they ever can. Is not here, then, a powerful motive to benevolent action; a consideration which should induce you not to be weary in well-doing?

3. *By a life of active benevolence, you are changed into the image of God, from glory to glory.* It is the most perfect epitome that was ever formed of the character of God, that he is Love: it is his delightful and unceasing employment to do good. Every thing in creation, every thing in providence, every thing in redemption, proves it. Would you, then, bear the lineaments of his character; and do you desire that you may wear his image with increasing brightness? Then, let me say, imitate his divine beneficence. Let it be the constant employment of your life to do good. This brings you up towards the standard of infinite perfection; and while it makes you like God, it makes you a constant object of his complacence and blessing.

4. Be encouraged to a life of benevolent action, by the consideration that *you hereby act in character not only as a creature of God, and a probationer for eternity, but especially as a professor of religion.* In acknowledging yourself a disciple of Jesus Christ, you not only recognize your obligations to do good, but avow your determination to do good; and it is only in proportion as your life is given to active benevolence, that you redeem the pledge which a christian profession involves. When you make it manifest that your grand aim is to diffuse blessings around you, to relieve the temporal and spiritual wants of your fellow creatures, and thus to leave the world the better for your having lived in it, your character is clothed with a majesty which does not belong to that of the hero or the statesman—the majesty of a consistent christian. But on the other hand, if you content yourself with a mere negative character, satisfied to do no harm, though you do little positive good, every man

who knows what you profess, will note your inconsistency, and will, at least in his heart, say, "You *profess* more, but what *do* you more than others?"

5. Finally: Let me urge you to a steady course of benevolent action, by the consideration that *in no other way, can you accomplish the design of your early conversion.* When God calls sinners into his kingdom at any period of life, he calls them to be active in his service: when he calls them in the morning of life, it is that they may labor for him early; and if he is pleased to continue them to an advanced period, that they may also labor long. Suppose, in his providence, he should spare you to advanced age—what an amount of good may you not accomplish; what a mighty influence may you not exert on the destinies of your fellow men; what large treasures of bliss and glory may you not lay up for yourselves in a better world! And what if you should die early? Still you do not wish to die without having done something to benefit your generation, and glorify God: and God, by calling you early into his kingdom, has declared that he is willing—nay, that he is desirous, that you should thus be honored. In the accomplishment of this benevolent design concerning you, see that you faithfully and diligently co-operate: do good to all men as you have opportunity; and God your Father and Redeemer will smile upon you from his throne, and ere long will take you up to dwell amid the glories of his own eternal beneficence.

LECTURE XVII.

THE YOUNG CHRISTIAN'S COURSE.

II. TIMOTHY IV. 7.

I HAVE FINISHED MY COURSE.

You will instantly perceive that I have chosen this passage somewhat in the way of accommodation. As it stands in the apostle's discourse, it is the language, not of a young christian, but of an aged christian, who is just closing his career of conflict and trial, and has heaven full in view. "I have finished my course—the labors and sufferings of a long life are now soon to be ended: already I have reached the hither part of the dark valley: the crown of righteousness, and the robe of glory, begin to glitter in my eye; and strains of heavenly music fall sweetly on my ear." Oh what a moment was that to Paul! Who would not covet death, if he could greet it with such joyful confidence, as a messenger to call him up to glory?

But in the present discourse, I purpose to consider the text as an expression of triumphant faith in a *young* christian, in the immediate prospect of his departure. In the series of discourses which I am now bringing to a close, I have contemplated a youth, first, as exposed, perhaps yielding, to the temptations of the world, and neglecting his immortal interests; then, as inquiring with

deep anxiety, "what he shall do to be saved;" then, as actually complying with the conditions of the gospel, and becoming a new creature in Christ Jesus; and subsequently, as walking in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, and thus growing in knowledge, piety, and usefulness. I now make the supposition—and it surely involves nothing improbable—that this same youth, in the midst of his christian activity, is arrested by the hand of death; and that, in the last hour of his life, as he contemplates the past, and looks forward to the future, he exclaims, "I have finished my course." I invite you, my young friends, to contemplate this youth—suppose, if you will, that it is one of your own companions—in these most solemn and interesting circumstances; and then answer to your own conscience, whether the joy of such a death does not compensate a thousand fold for all the sacrifices which, yourselves being judges, religion ever required of him.

Without adverting particularly to the obvious fact that the text contains an allusion to the Grecian games, I shall proceed directly to call your attention to the COURSE here spoken of, in application to a young christian: to its *character*, its *close*, its *consequences*.

I. Its *Character*.

And, I remark, in the first place, that it is a *brief* course. Brief indeed is the course of that christian who even fills up his threescore years and ten; for the life of man, at its best state, is as a dream of the night when one awaketh. But in the case which I am supposing, it is a brief period compared with that which falls to the lot of many others. This is true of the whole period of youthful life; and it is especially true of that part of it, which is devoted to the service of Christ. The youth perhaps has lived twelve, fifteen, twenty years, before he has ever thought seriously of his soul's salvation: supposing him, at either of these periods, to have entered on the religious

life, and yet to find an early grave, how short the season allotted to his christian course! Whatever he may have done, or whatever he may have suffered, in the cause of his Redeemer, has all been brought within very narrow limits.

Again: It is a *beneficent* course. However some may imagine that a life of religion necessarily implies seclusion from the world, and others, that it imposes no peculiar obligations, the christian of whom I am speaking, having been faithful, has acted upon a far different principle. From the time that he became a new creature in Christ Jesus, he has steadily recognized his obligation to live not for himself, but for Him who died for his salvation. His grand object has been to do good;—to do good in the various relations of life;—to do good to all men, so far as he has had opportunity and ability. He has found no time to waste in the follies to which many of his companions have yielded; but has endeavored, to the extent of his power, to give all his hours to some employment, which would contribute to render the world better for his having lived in it.

Again: It is a *self-denied* course. At its very commencement, he took a deliberate survey of the field he was about to enter, and saw that he could do nothing without constant conflict; but he resolved to be a christian notwithstanding; and from that hour, he became crucified to the world, and the world was crucified to him. Not improbably he had much to encounter in leaving gay associates, and taking his stand on the side of religion; but he dared to be singular then, and the resolutions which he then formed to resist temptation, he has steadily adhered to since. He has found himself in only a partially sanctified state, with corrupt affections and inclinations often prompting him to sin; and sometimes he has been ready to exclaim, under the power of indwelling corruption, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Nevertheless,

he has resolutely prosecuted the warfare with himself, and has seen his spiritual enemies gradually put under his feet. It has been his constant prayer, his earnest endeavor, that he might gain an entire victory over all his evil passions and appetites, and that every principle of his nature might be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Again: It is a *dependent* course: and by this, I mean that he has not gone about the performance of his duties in his own strength. He has recollected that all his springs were in God; that while he was commanded to be active, he was dependent for the very power of action on the influence of the Holy Spirit. Instead of perverting this truth to minister to indolence on the one hand, or presumption on the other, he uses it as furnishing at once an argument for activity and humility; and while he doeth what his hand findeth to do with his might, he habitually connects with his efforts to do good, a sense of dependence on Almighty grace. Hence that may be said of him in reference to his general character, which was said of Paul in reference to his conversion—"Behold he prayeth!"

Further: It is an *increasingly easy* course. When he first contemplated the obstacles which would oppose his progress, they seemed to him perhaps well nigh insurmountable; and it may be that he hesitated long before he took up the resolution to encounter them. One of the greatest difficulties he apprehended was that of separating himself from worldly companions and vanities, and taking the attitude of a determined friend of religion, in the face of the world: but he has found the difficulty in this respect constantly diminishing with each successive effort; and that, not only inasmuch as his efforts have contributed to increase his power of action, on the principle that every faculty is improved by proper exercise, but also because his determined perseverance has discouraged, in a great degree, the attempts to draw him away from his duty.

And as it is in this respect, so it is in every other. He has indeed, as he has advanced, learned more of the corruption of his heart, and of his need of a constant divine influence; nevertheless, every temptation over which he has gained the victory, has rendered each successive one less formidable: every evil affection which he has been enabled to crucify, has given him an advantage in respect to every other which has risen in his heart: every measure of grace which he has received, has been a measure of strength to enable him the better to discharge his duty. In this way, amidst all the disclosures of his own corruptions, amidst the constantly accumulating weight of duty, his course has continually become more easy; and obstacles which once seemed not only real, but even appalling, have, at length, entirely disappeared.

Moreover, it is on the whole a *pleasant* course. Yes, it is pleasant, with all the conflicts and trials with which it is connected; for with these very conflicts and trials, grace intermingles; so that the cup which seems to have in it nothing but bitterness, has really little else than consolation. If I were to speak of the elements of the joy which is here experienced, I should tell you of that peace which passeth understanding; of that hope which is an anchor to the soul; of that living faith which rests in and appropriates the promises of God; which unites the soul to its Saviour, and impresses upon it his image; which takes from adversity its terrors, and plucks from death his sting. Leaving out of view then altogether the exceeding and eternal weight of glory, I say there is enough to justify the remark that the young christian's course is pleasant; and especially when compared with the only other course which it was in his power to pursue.

And finally, it is a *successful* course. His companions in age have had various objects in view, and have pursued them with great labor and perseverance. Some have been toiling for one worldly object, and some for another; and either the object of their pursuit has not

been attained, or being attained, has been found unsatisfactory. And not improbably some among them have already rendered their dying testimony to the folly and vanity of their pursuits. He, on the other hand, *has* succeeded in his efforts—I may say, has succeeded fully; for he has been honored as the instrument of diffusing blessings around him, and he is an heir to "a crown of righteousness that fadeth not away." But in these remarks I anticipate a succeeding division of the discourse.

Let me then, from the character of the young christian's course, pass,

II. To its *close*. The text contemplates it as *finished*.

It is finished in a *peaceful* manner. It may be that the young christian has often contemplated death as an object of dismay; and though he may have been able to think of every other trial with composure, yet as often as he has thought of going down into the dark valley, he has been oppressed with fearful apprehension. But the terrors of death gradually diminish as his end draws near. His faith becomes more active, his hope more firm, his views of heaven stronger and brighter; the promises of the gospel come home to his soul in all their reality, and richness, and power; and he feels ready to breathe out his life in an act of thanksgiving to redeeming grace. He sees around him friends, it may be parents, brothers, sisters, to whom he is united by the most endearing ties; but he can cheerfully give them up, for the community of friends to which he is going; and he gives them up too, it may be, in the strong confidence that they will ere long be his companions in glory. The world, its objects and interests, gradually fade upon his vision, till he falls calmly and sweetly to rest, and the place that has known him hitherto, knows him no more.

But the close of the young christian's course is often more than peaceful—it is *joyful and triumphant*. The soul, as it approaches the hour of final conflict, sometimes

gathers surprising strength ; and is enabled to raise the shout of victory, while it is not yet dislodged from its earthly tabernacle. Such are the visions of glory that entrance the departing spirit, that the agony of dying appears lighter than nothing ;—it is even forgotten, till the soul is reminded that it is past, by finding itself among those whose robes are washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. Often have I seen the young christian, and sometimes even the naturally timid female, breathing out her spirit on the bed of death with unutterable transport ; committing herself into her Redeemer's hands, not merely without a chill of distrust, but with the joyful, thankful exclamation—" I know in whom I have believed :" and when I have seen and heard this, I have wished that I might bring in every thoughtless youth around me, as a spectator of the scenes of that dying bed ; not doubting that each one in view of it *must* say, " Let *me* die the death of the righteous, and let *my* last end be like his !"

Nevertheless, the close of the young christian's course, peaceful and even triumphant as it may be, is *humble*. For he realizes strongly—probably more strongly than at any preceding period of his life—that in his best attempts to serve his Master, he has been but an unprofitable servant. When he thinks of the waywardness, the listlessness, the inconstancy, by which even his religious life has been marked, and then of that grace which has all along been manifested to keep him from final apostacy, and then of the peace and joy which he is permitted to experience in his last moments, and finally glances the eye of faith onward to the glories which await him in heaven ; in a word, when he reflects that all that enters into the work of his salvation is grace—rich grace, and that instead of leaving the world in triumph, he deserves to leave it in despair, and to go down to the world of despair ;—when he thinks of all this, I say, he desires, amid all the glory of dying in the Lord, to lie at the foot

of the cross, and with his last breath, to give to God all the praise of his salvation. "Not unto me, who am less than the least of all saints," is the language of his soul, "but to thy great name, Merciful Redeemer, to the efficacy of thy blood—to the power of thy grace—to the merit of thy intercession, be all the honor of my redemption from the eternal pit, and of my exaltation to that throne of light which awaits me in heaven!"

And finally, under this article, the young christian finishes his course in a manner that is *honorable to religion*. It may be that some of the thoughtless youth around him have called his piety by the hard name of hypocrisy or fanaticism; but if they are present to witness his closing scene, they have evidence that they were in a most wretched mistake. Here they see that the religion which he had exhibited in life, is an all-sustaining principle; that the Saviour whom he had served by a course of self-denying obedience, fulfils his promise to be his stay and his staff in the dark valley. And such a scene, if any thing, is fitted to impress them with the realities of eternity, and to awaken them to an inquiry concerning their own salvation. It is fitted too, to strengthen the faith, and quicken the obedience of christians, and especially of their young christian friends, who may be present to witness their departure, and who are to remain yet longer in the field of conflict, before they are dismissed for their reward. More than once has the triumphant death of a young christian carried conviction to the heart even of the scoffer and of the profligate: often has it brought the anxious yet lingering inquirer to a decision on the great question that has involved his immortal interests; and where is the christian who has witnessed such a scene, who will not testify that it has diminished his attachment to the world, and strengthened his confidence in his Redeemer, and rendered the gospel more precious to him, as containing a death-bed religion? In whatever other circumstances the infidel may scoff at

the religion of Jesus, he cannot—I had almost said, even if he had the malignity of a fallen spirit—he cannot revile this religion, as it is acted out in the peace and joy with which the young christian often yields up his soul into the hands of his Redeemer.

III. Let me now, in the third place, call your attention, for a few moments, to the *consequences* of the young christian's course. These we will consider in relation to *himself*, and in relation to *the world*.

His course is followed by most important blessings to *himself*. It is a blessing, a rich blessing, to be able to leave behind us *a good name;* to live after we are dead, in the grateful and affectionate remembrance of those who survive us. The voice of popular applause which sometimes rings in shouts at the virtues, and even at the vices of men, and which, by a slight change of circumstances, can be changed into the voice of execration, is indeed an unimportant matter, and is rather to be deprecated than desired. But to desire that our memories may be embalmed in the hearts of the wise and good, that we may be spoken of with gratitude and kindness, as having lived for the benefit of our fellow-men—this is a genuine dictate of nature; and perhaps there is no degree of depravity that can dislodge this original desire from the breast. I say then, it is a delightful consequence of the course which the young christian has pursued, that it secures to him a good name after he is dead: it secures to him a place in the affections of all, in whose affections a good man would desire to live. When his neighbors and acquaintances come to unite in a prayer around his unburied remains, and then go and see them deposited in the grave, that funeral service will not be, as in many other cases, a dull formality; but you will see that many hearts are in it, and that there are many out of the circle of near friends, who feel that they have sustained a loss. And long after the grave has closed

upon his remains, those who knew him—especially those who have been benefited by his counsels, or example, or prayers, will delight to dwell on his memory, and will speak of that as a dark dispensation by which so much christian promise, so many budding hopes, were prematurely blasted. Yes, though his course has been brief, it has been so bright, and holy, and useful, that it cannot soon be forgotten: the record of what he was will remain fair in many hearts, when the moss shall have grown over his tomb-stone, and the worm shall have revelled upon his body.

But far *richer blessings* than these are to crown the young christian's course—blessings which are to fall upon the path of his whole future existence. For the moment that death has done its work—yes, at that moment when the bosom of surviving friendship heaves its heaviest sigh—his spirit is before the throne of God; an innumerable multitude of glorified beings welcome his arrival; the songs of redemption tremble on his ear; the glories of the upper world blaze upon his eye. From all doubt, and sin, and sorrow, he finds himself for ever set free: he has become an inhabitant of a world of light, in which he can contemplate even the unveiled glory of God;—of a world of purity, in which there is not a vestige of any thing that defileth;—of a world of joy, in which all tears are wiped away. His character is that of a glorified immortal; his residence is the third heavens; his employment, unceasing praise to God and the Lamb; his society, the general assembly and church of the first-born, an innumerable company of angels, Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, and God, the Judge and Father of all.

And where, during this period of the soul's perfection, is his body? Slumbering in the grave; it may be, dissolved into its original elements, and scattered to the winds. But shall it always be thus? No: the voice of the archangel shall wake that slumbering dust, and

collect, and reorganize it, by an Almighty energy; and instead of being a corruptible body, it shall be an incorruptible one; and it shall be united to that glorified spirit; and the whole man shall be brought into judgment; and shall recognize in the Judge a Redeemer and Friend; and shall hear the sentence of acquittal and reward; and then shall advance onward into the ages of eternity, clothed with the splendors of immortal beauty. Say then, are not the consequences of the young christian's course glorious to himself? If it were a perpetual scene of wretchedness, unmitigated by the least consolation, and were always to terminate amid the fires, and agonies, and horrors, of martyrdom, tell me, whether it were not wise to incur this, and a thousand fold more than this, for the sake of obtaining such a reward?

But the course of the young christian is ordinarily followed by rich blessings to *others*. For though he has lived but a little while, he has not lived in vain. He has lived long enough, and been a christian long enough, to sow some seed that shall bear fruit unto eternal life. Perhaps his holy example, and faithful efforts, in the family, have been blessed to the salvation of some of its members. Or perhaps his labors in the sabbath school have been crowned, in an unusual degree, with the divine blessing; and have been the means of bringing many children to love their Creator and Redeemer. Or perhaps he has been the instrument of reclaiming some of his former thoughtless associates from haunts of irreligion, and habits of levity, and bringing them to attend seriously to the concerns of their souls. Or he may have been the parent of some benevolent institution, which will live and continue its operations long after he is dead, and perhaps into the ages of the millenium. In either or all of these ways, he may have labored in the cause of Christ; and when it is recollected that influence is, from its very nature, progressive and accumulative,

how much, think you, may he be found to have done, in the end of the world, for the benefit of his fellow-creatures? On how many myriads of souls may the labors of a few short years, it may be of a single year, tell, in the whole progress of his being? I ask, are not the consequences of this brief course, to the world, as well as to himself, literally incalculable?

Who will not say, on a review of this subject, that *it furnishes a powerful argument to every young christian, for persevering diligence in the service of his Master*? You have entered on a course which, for aught you know, may very speedily be closed. If you could read what is written concerning you in the book of God's secret counsels, you might possibly know that you have almost reached the limit of your probation; that you are on the eve of going to render up your account. I know that you desire to finish your course with joy. I know that you desire that it may truly be said of you, after you are dead, that your life has been a blessing to the world. I know that you desire to crowd into this little period as much of service as you can, to that Saviour who has died to purchase the reward to which you are looking forward. Well then, if your days are so rapidly passing, what remains but that you should, during the residue of life, consecrate all your powers to the honor of your Master. Dream not, my young friends, that the course of a mere nominal christian can terminate in joy and glory. Dream not that the forms of religion can be safely substituted for its life and power. Remember that nothing but practical godliness will stand, when flesh and heart fail. See to it, that your course be the course of the humble, self-denied, devoted christian; then will its termination be happy; and its consequences, to you and the world, in time and in eternity, unutterably glorious.

But if this subject supplies a powerful argument to the young christian, for a devoted religious life, *it furnishes an argument equally powerful to every irreligious*

youth, to become immediately reconciled to God. Tell me, my young friends, whether the course which has now been presented before you, does not, in every respect, approve itself to your judgment, more than that which you hitherto have been, and still are, pursuing. What though there may be self-denial, and conflict, and bitter repentance, in a life of religion, yet are you not satisfied that it has, on the whole, greatly the advantage, even on the score of happiness, of a life of sinful indulgence; and is it not, in the view of all whose good opinion is worth possessing—nay, is it not, in the sober judgment of your own conscience, far more honorable? But suppose, as it respects both happiness and honor in this world, they were alike; which course, think you, is the most desirable in its close? Would you rather have in the hour of death the remorse, the wretchedness, the fearful anticipations, which impenitence begets, or the peace that passeth understanding, the hope full of immortality, the joy unspeakable and full of glory, which are inspired by the review of a life that has been devoted to the service of Christ? And after you are dead, would you rather have it said of you, that you had lived for the benefit of your fellow-men, or that you had lived for the gratification of self? And in eternity, would you choose to be associated with seraphs or with fiends; to be employed in wailing or in praise; to have a part in the resurrection of life or in the resurrection of damnation? I am sure not one of you can hesitate in what manner to answer these questions: not one of you but must feel that the lot of the righteous is infinitely to be preferred before that of the wicked:—I venture even to add, not one of you but intends ere long to make the lot of the righteous his own. I warn you then, once more, that there is no time to be lost. Not an hour passes, but your immortal interests are in jeopardy. Yield yourselves then to the service of God without delay; and though you should die early, you will die safely and

peacefully ;—will die to live and reign with Christ on his throne for ever and ever.

I here close the series of discourses, my young friends, which have, for a considerable time, occupied you, and which have been designed for your special benefit. I may be permitted to say that I have been gratified, in no small degree, by the respectful attention you have rendered them ; and nothing now remains, on my part, but that I should commend them to your serious recollection, and to the blessing of Almighty God. It shall be my earnest prayer—and I invite you to join me in it—that this effort made for your salvation may be crowned by the influence of the Holy Spirit ; and that in the day when we shall meet to testify how I have preached, and how you have heard, it may appear to our mutual and everlasting joy, that this course of instruction which is now closed, has been to some of you—to many of you—to all of you, a savor of life unto life.

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